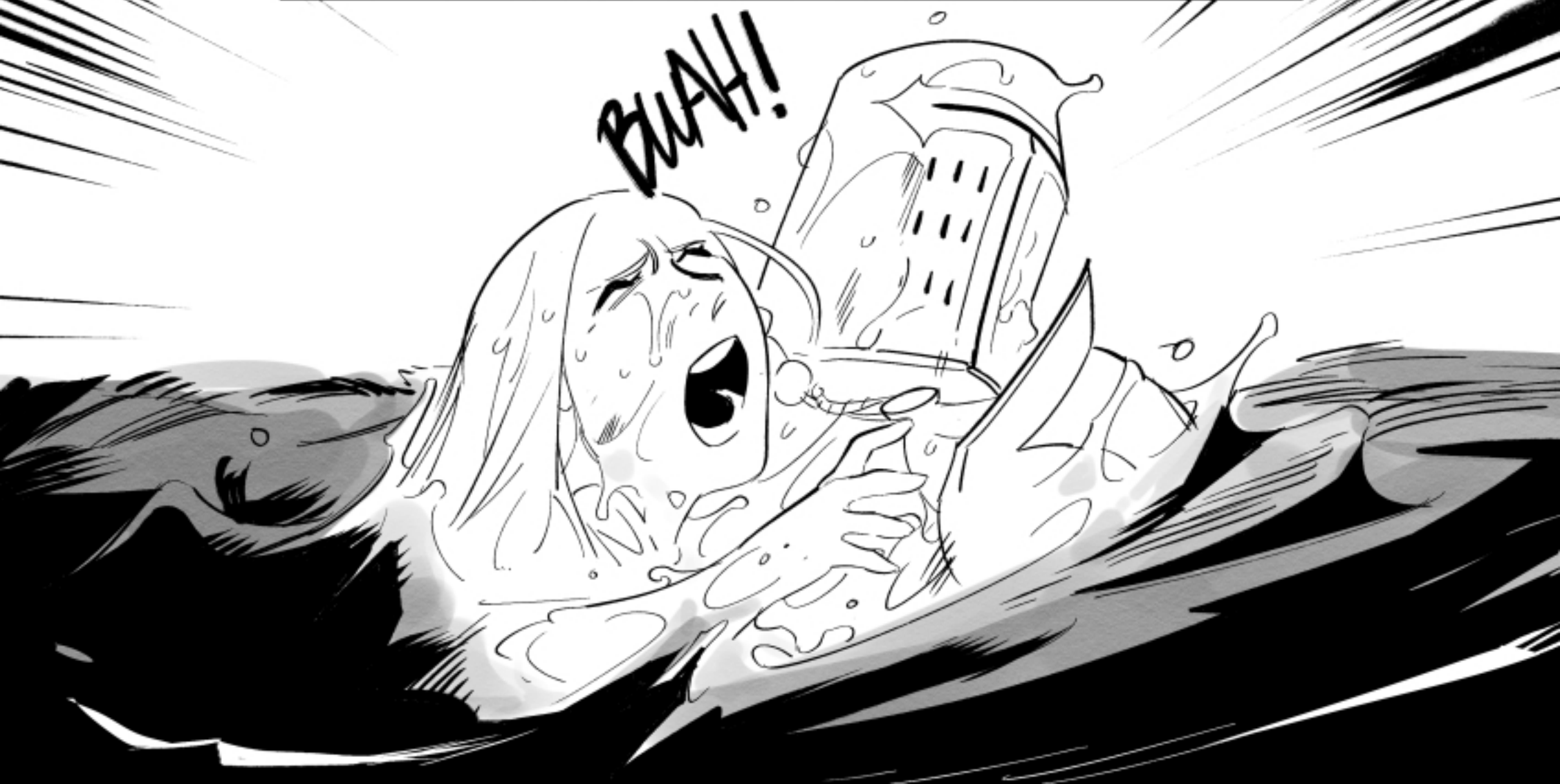


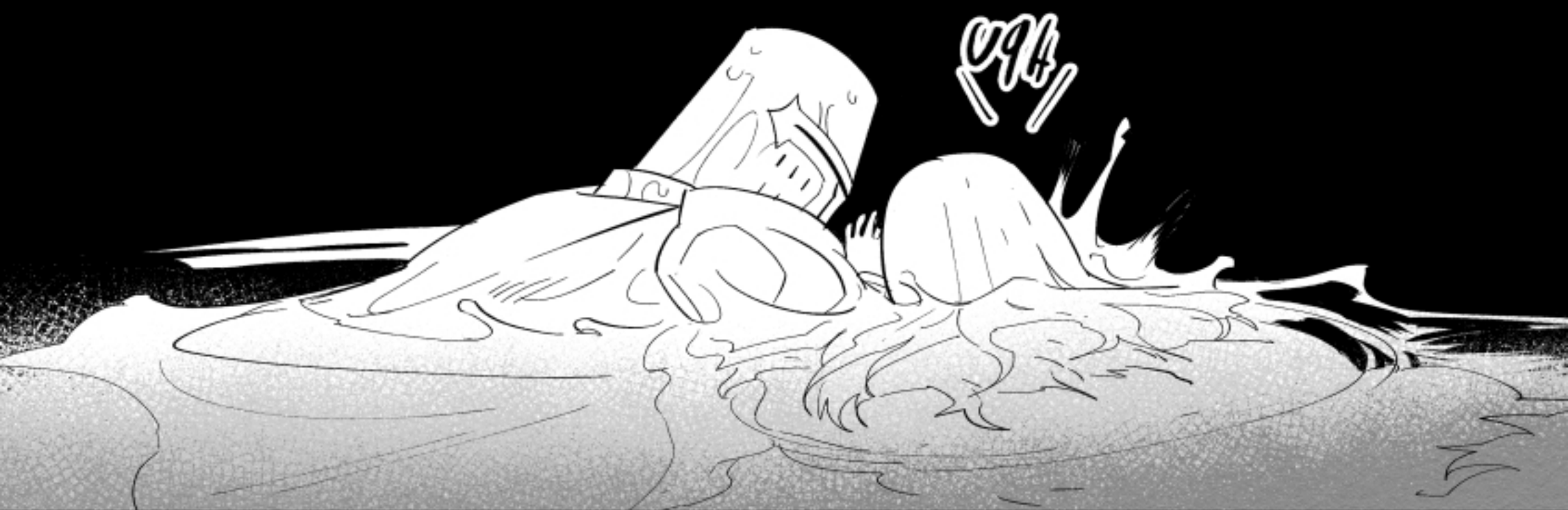




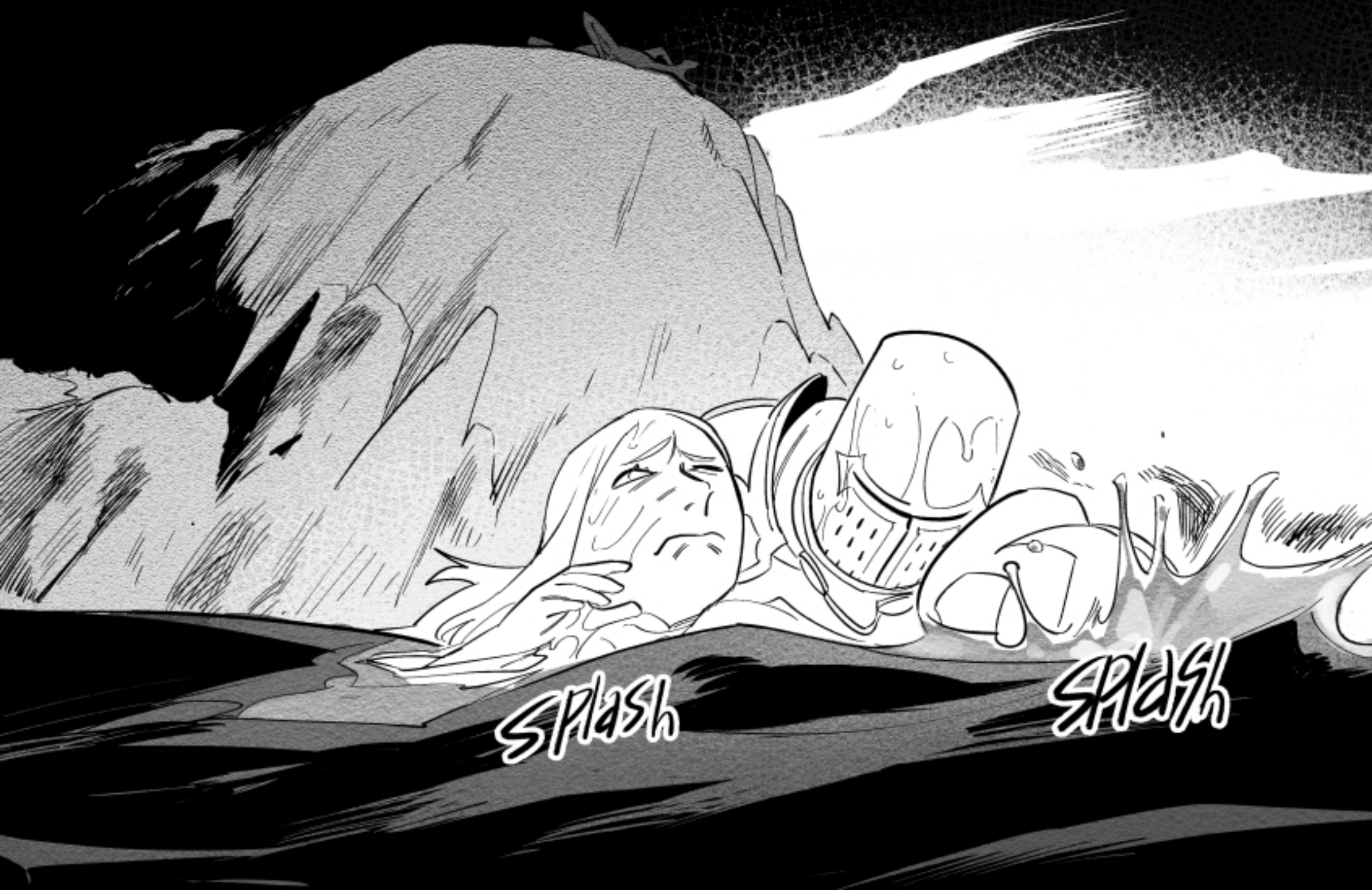
CROAK-

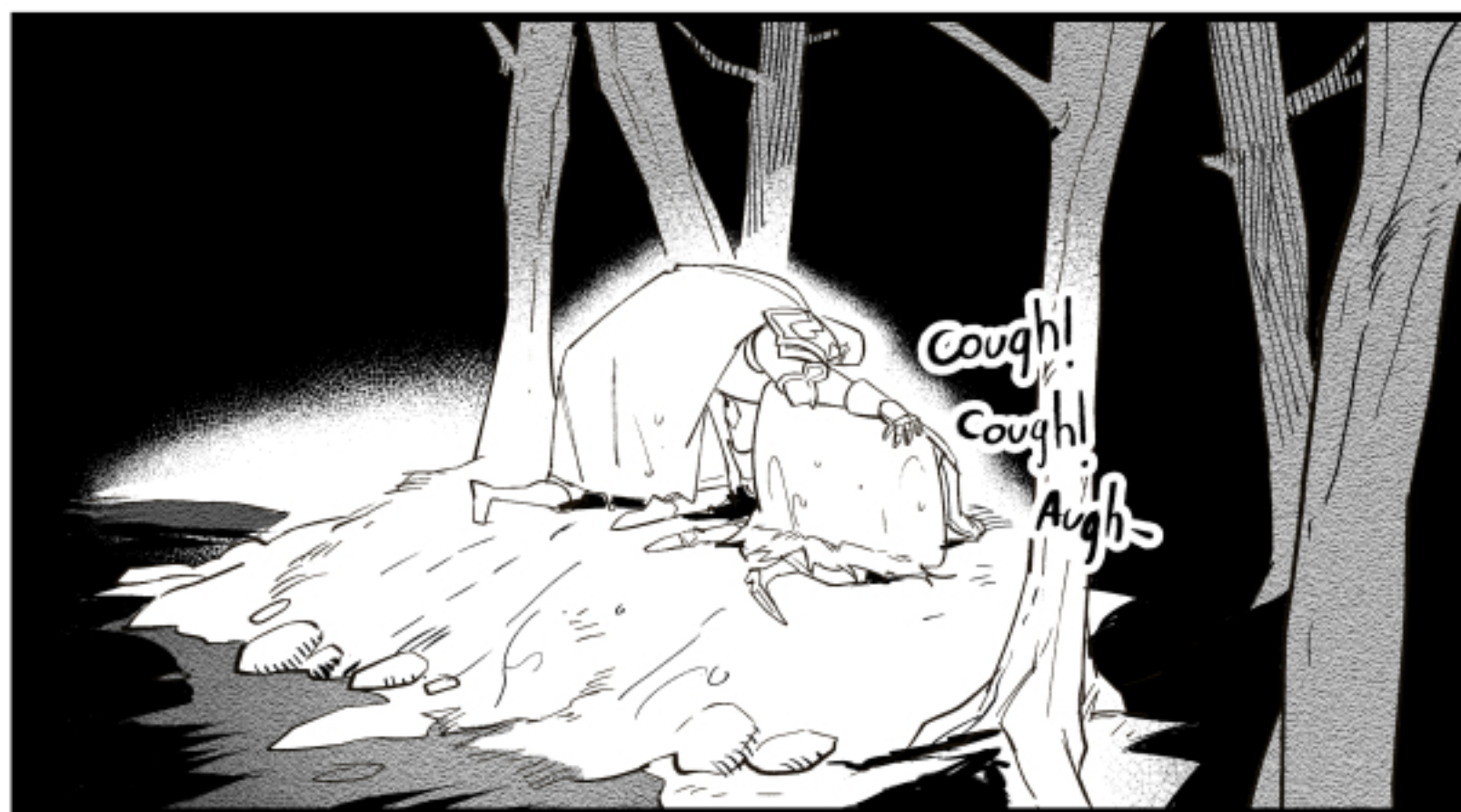


BWAH!



THEIR MOTOR SKILLS AND THE COLD MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM TO SWIM







BOND BY FIRE

Chapter 23

DAMNIT-

GODS BE DAMNED!!



WE LOST EVERYTHING,
EVERYTHING WE HAD!

DAMNIT!



AND I'M
SOAKED!

BWAH!





SOAKED!
SOAKED WITH BLOOD, WITH CRAP

WITH-- WITH...

I'M GOING TO GET
A COLD, I'M GOING
TO GET SICK--

I'M GOING TO DIE!!

EVERYTHING I DO GOES WRONG.
FIRST WE GO BACK TO MY
MOTHER, THEN SHE POISONS YOU

THEN-- GRRR!

PRIN-

HEGE.

HEGE





HOW DO YOU MANAGE TO
STAY POSITIVE...?

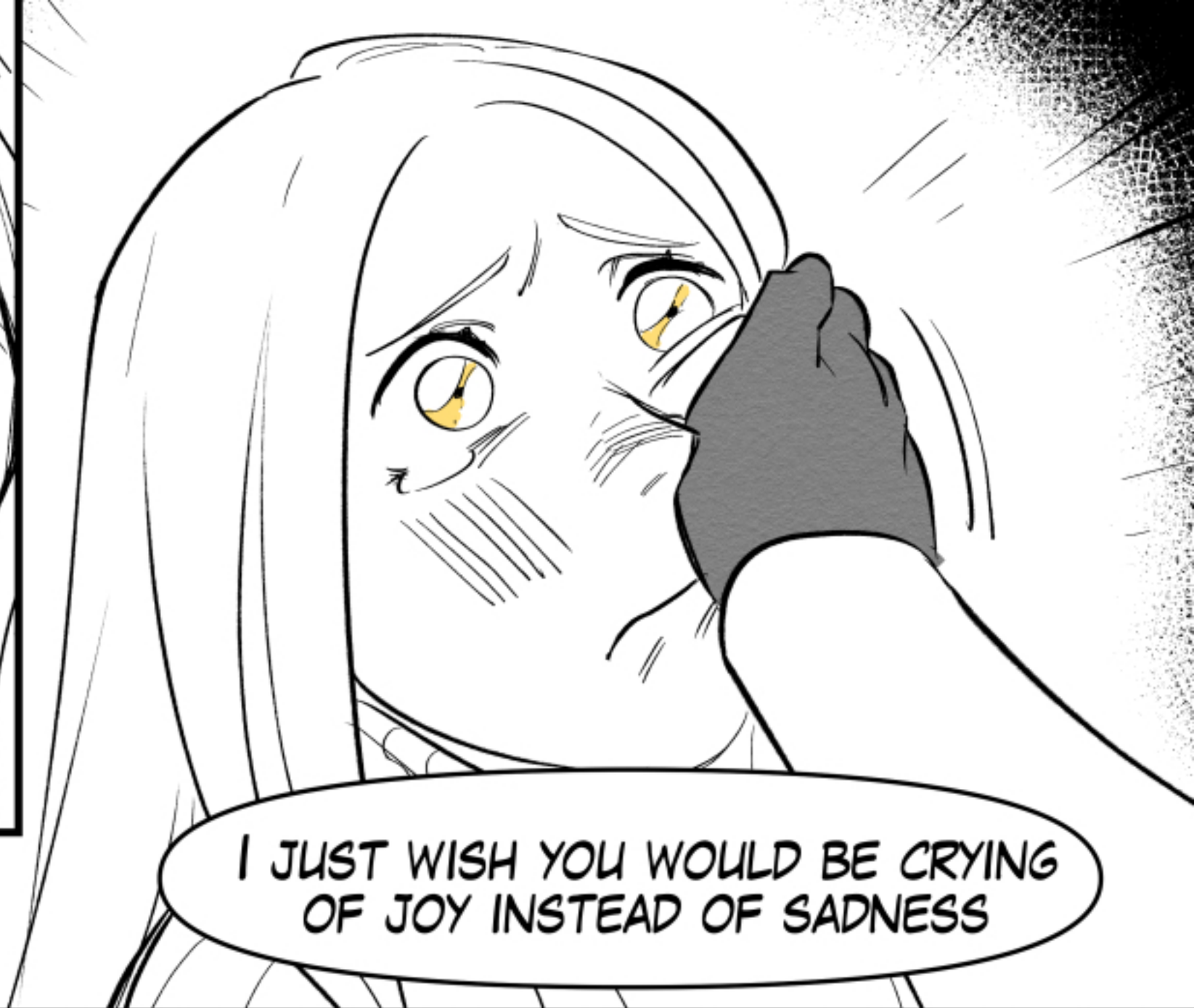


IT IS MY DUTY, BUT
YOU ALSO GIVE ME MY
VERY NEEDED STRENGTH

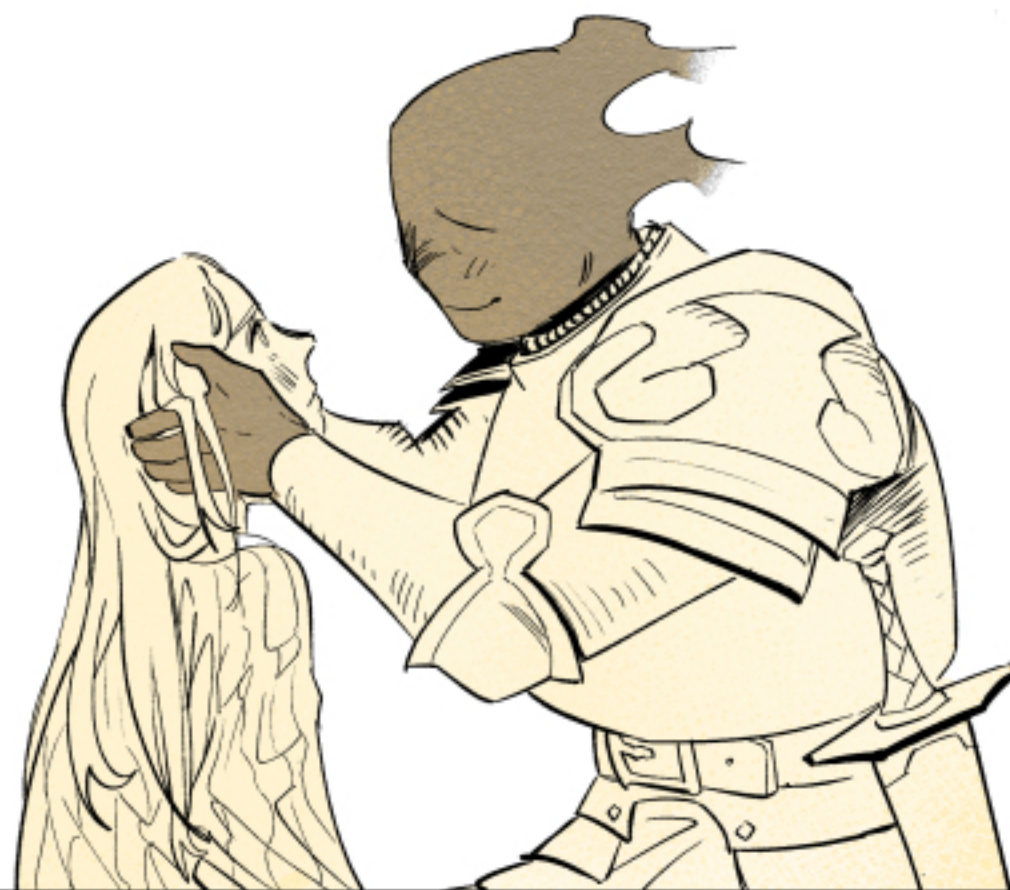
WITHOUT YOU, I THINK I
WOULD HAVE GIVEN UP
ALREADY.



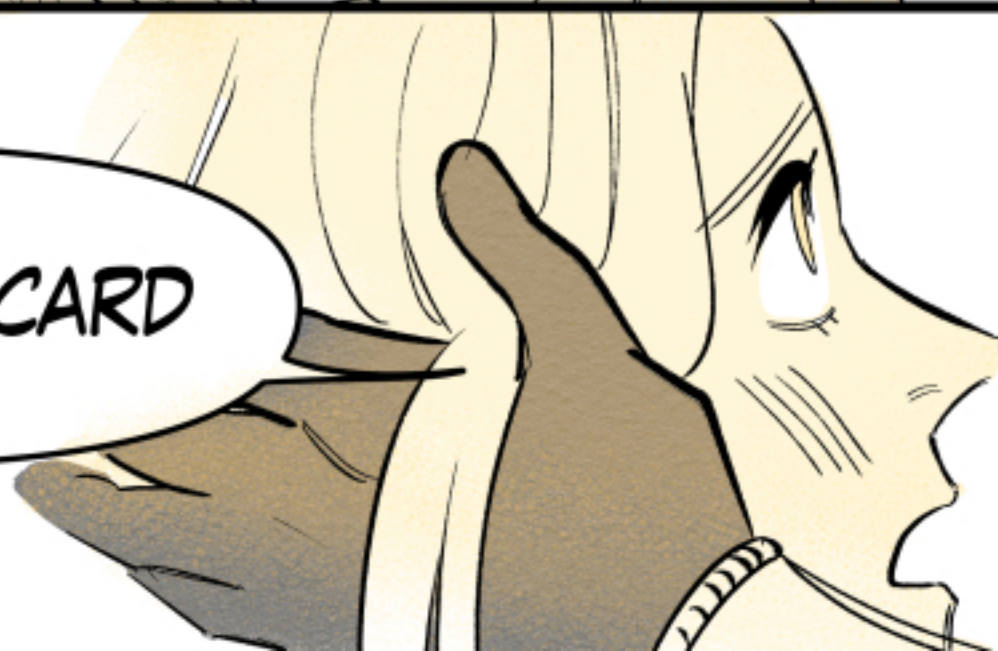


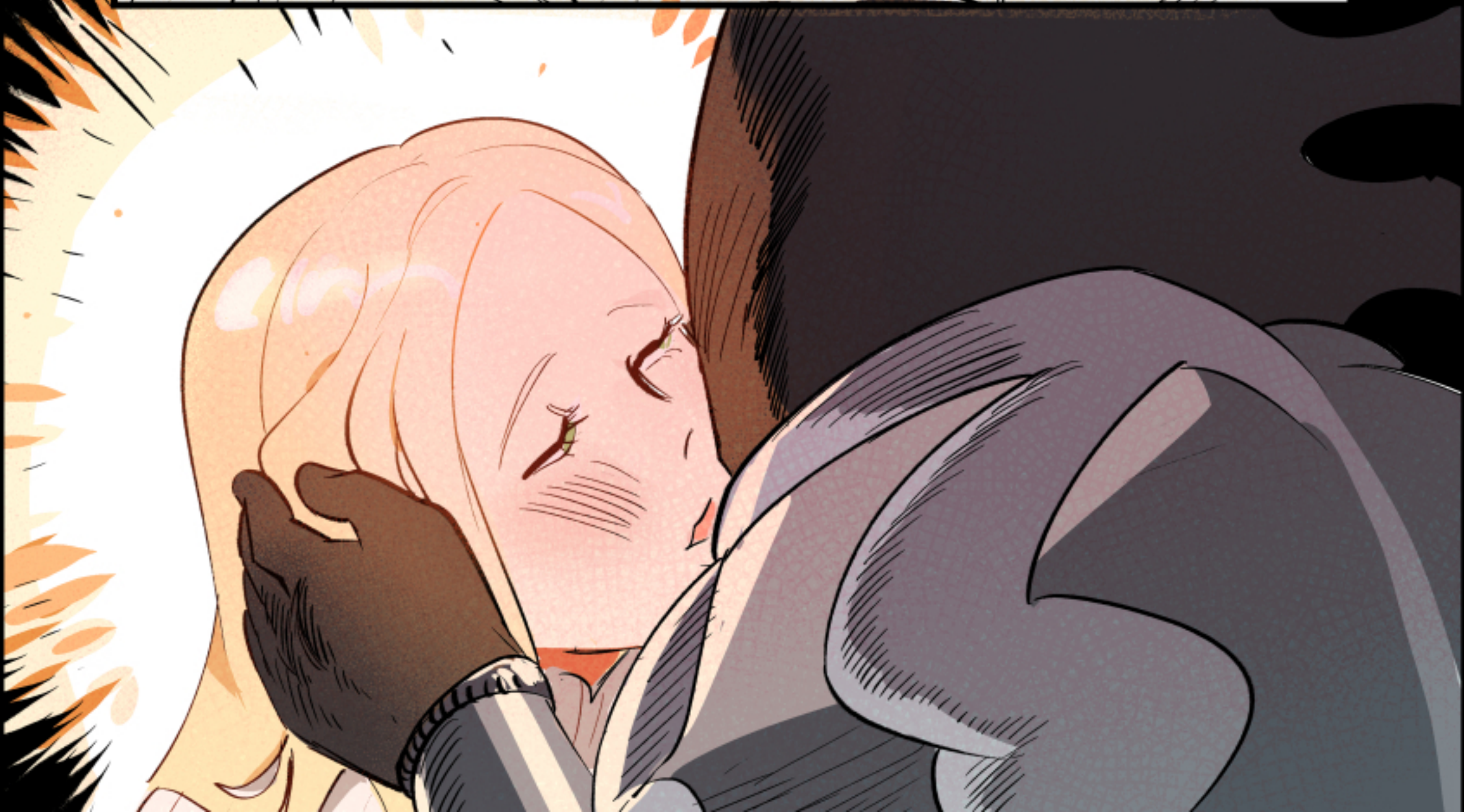
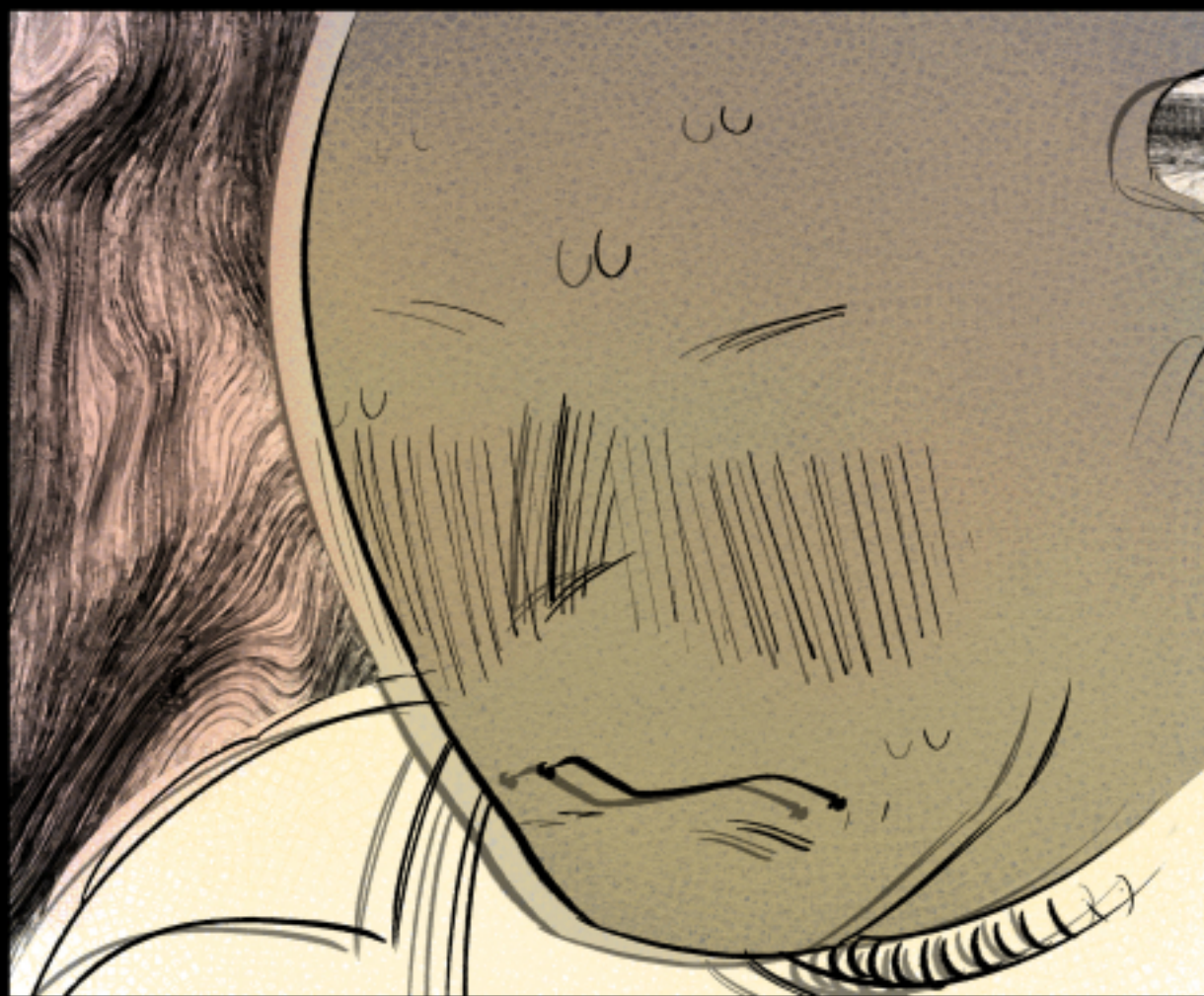


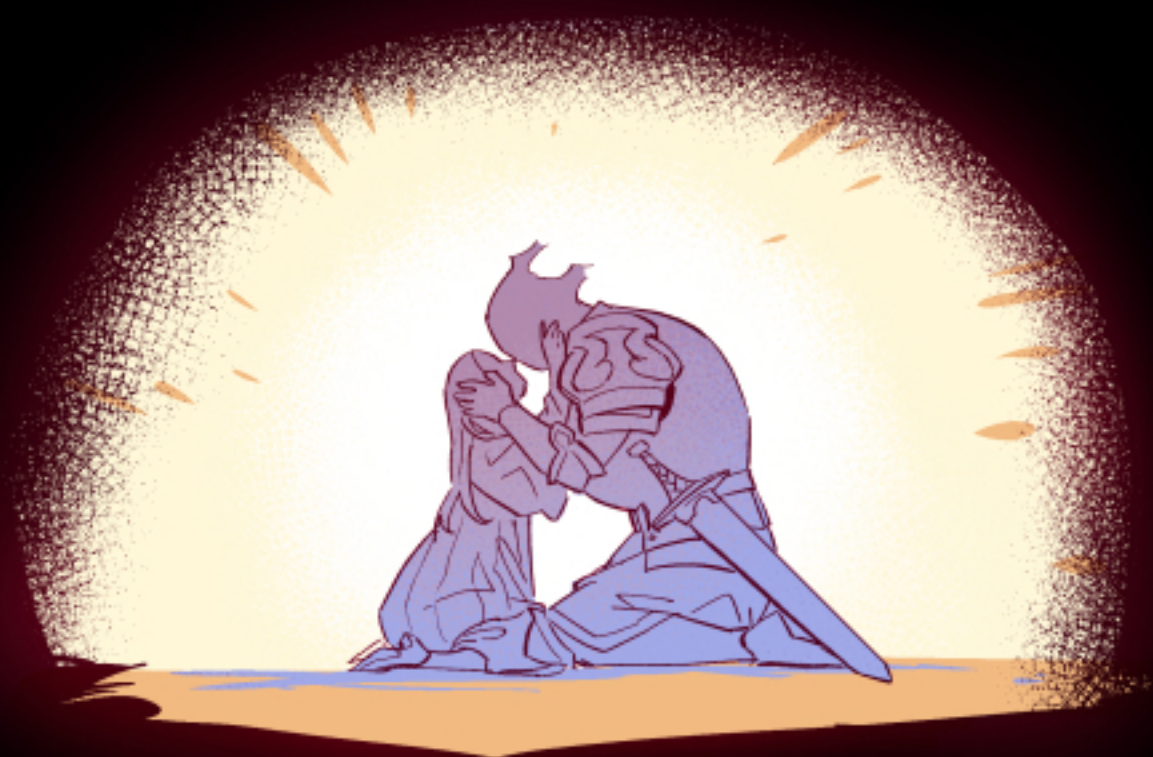
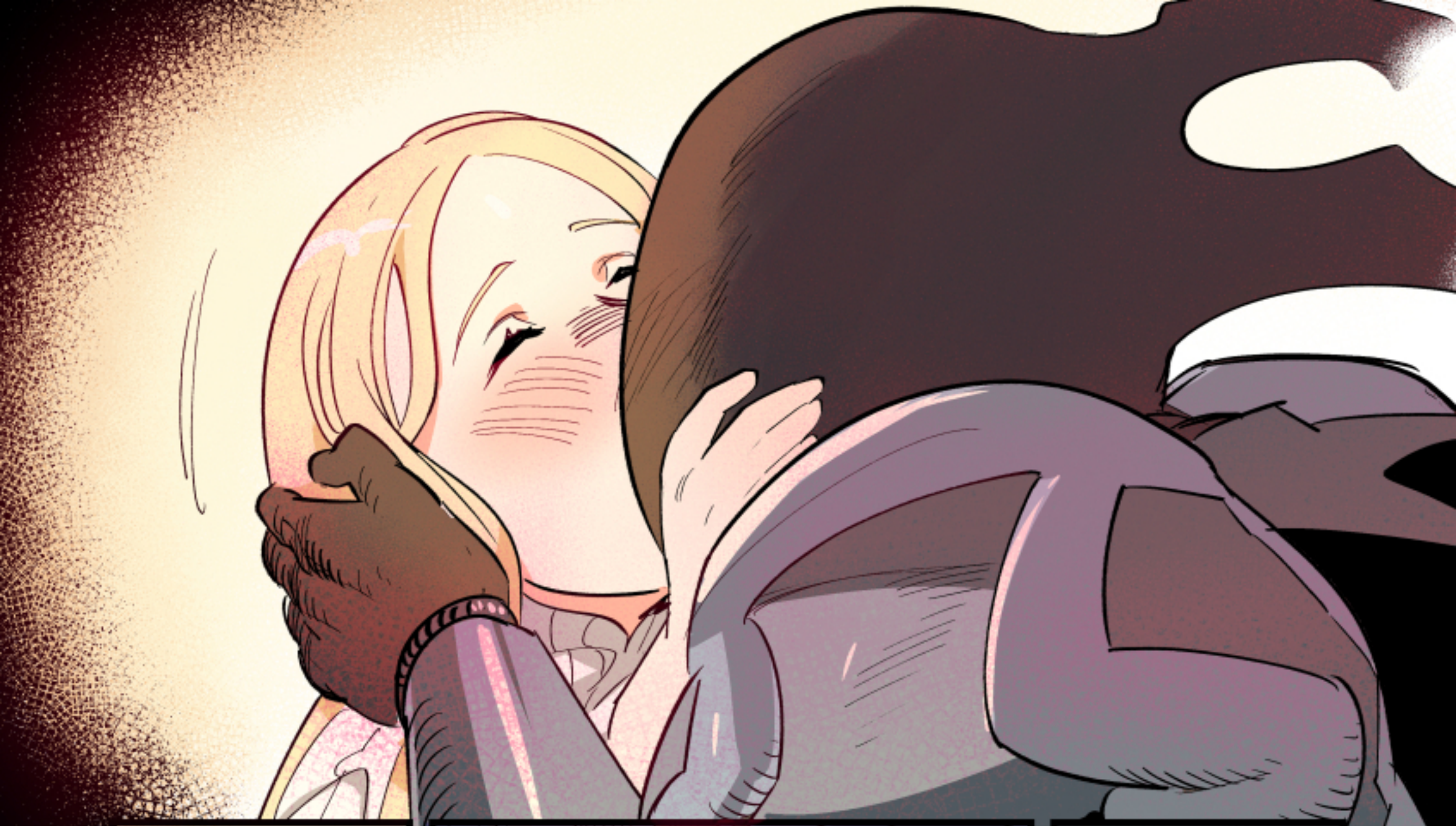
I JUST WISH YOU WOULD BE CRYING
OF JOY INSTEAD OF SADNESS

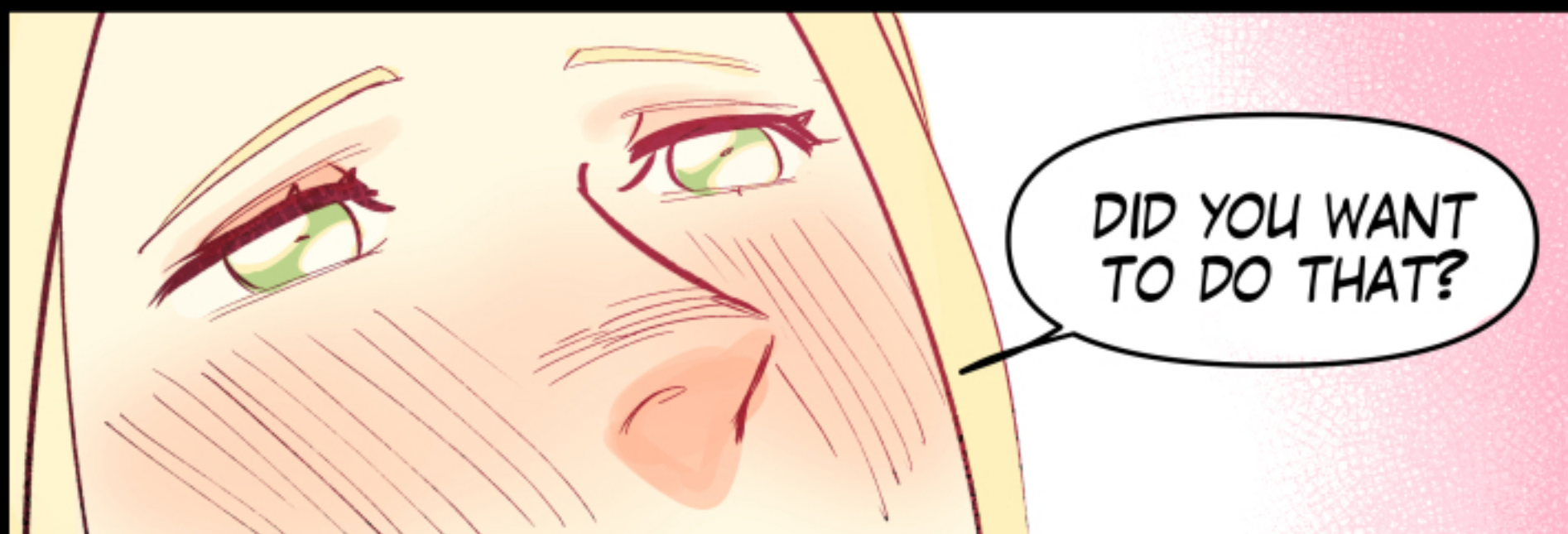


KISS ME, RICARD









DID YOU WANT
TO DO THAT?

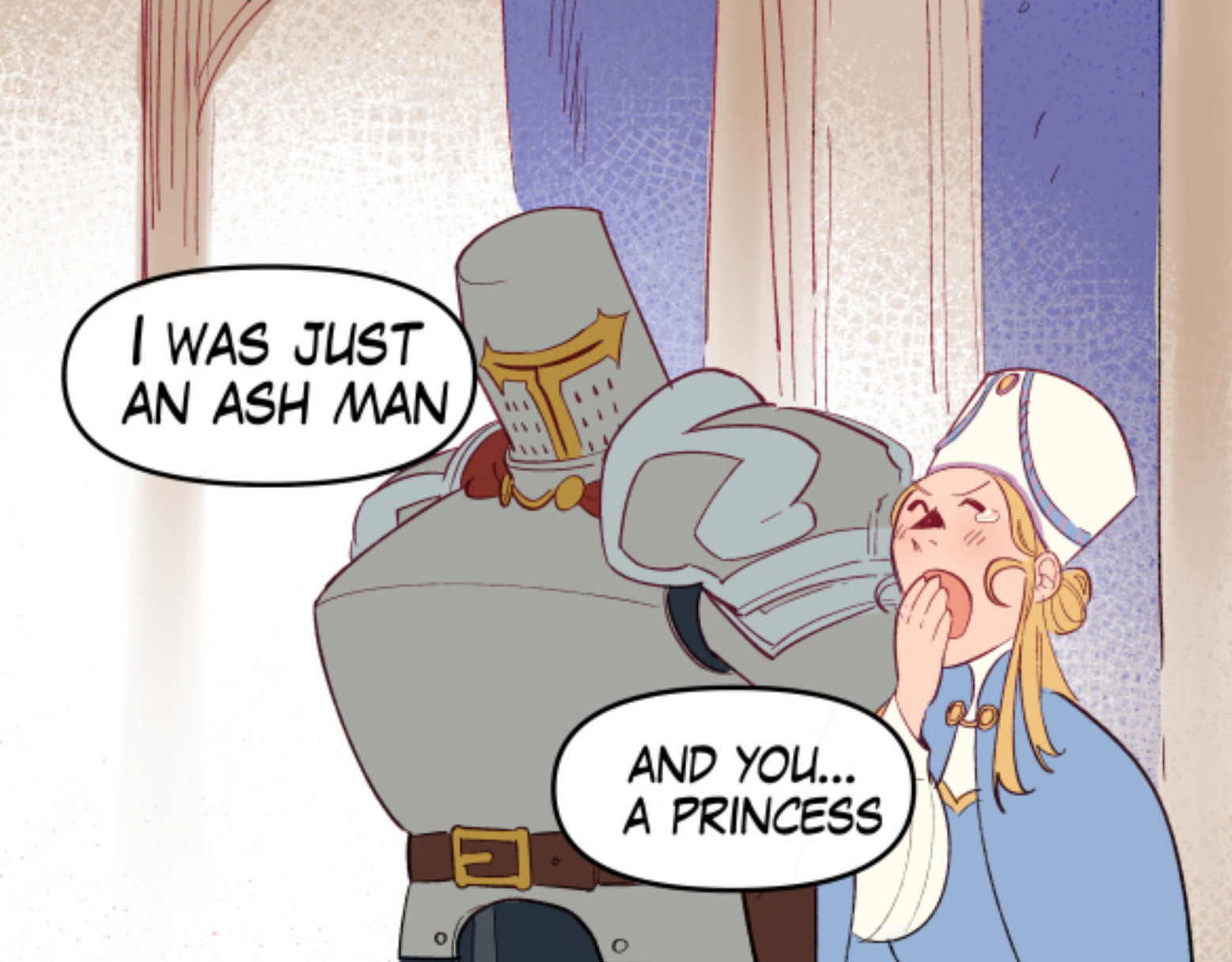


...
YES...

SINCE WHEN?

IT WAS AROUND
THAT CHRISTMAS
WHEN YOU GIFTED ME
THOSE MARZIPANS

THAT'S A LONG TIME AGO.
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME?



I WAS JUST
AN ASH MAN

AND YOU...
A PRINCESS



I'M SORRY. I
CONSIDERED
MY FEELINGS
EGOISTICAL

I STILL THINK
THEY ARE.



RICARD

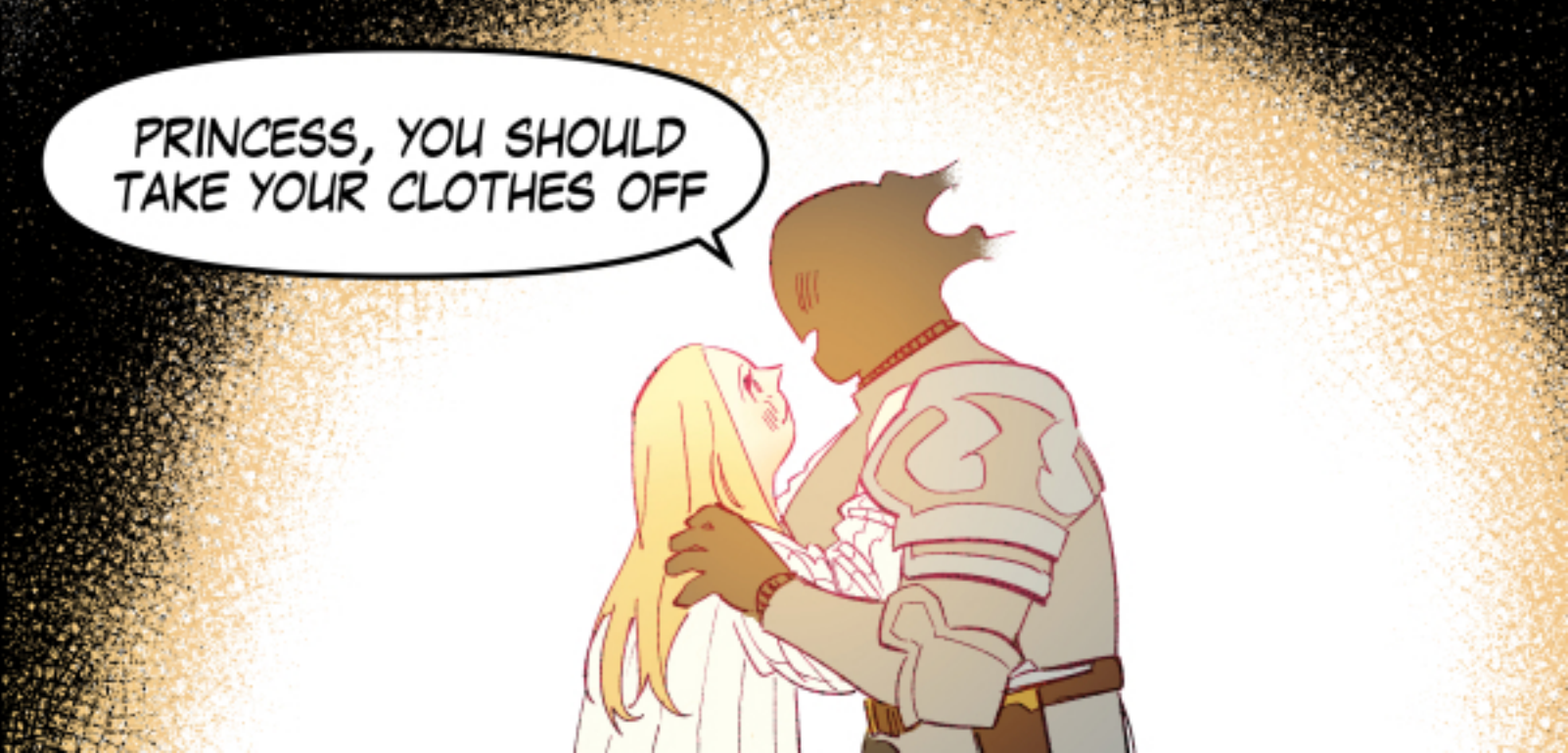


YOU ARE AND ALWAYS BE MORE THAN
"AN ASH MAN", MORE HUMAN THAN THE
HUMANS I'VE MET IN MY LIFE

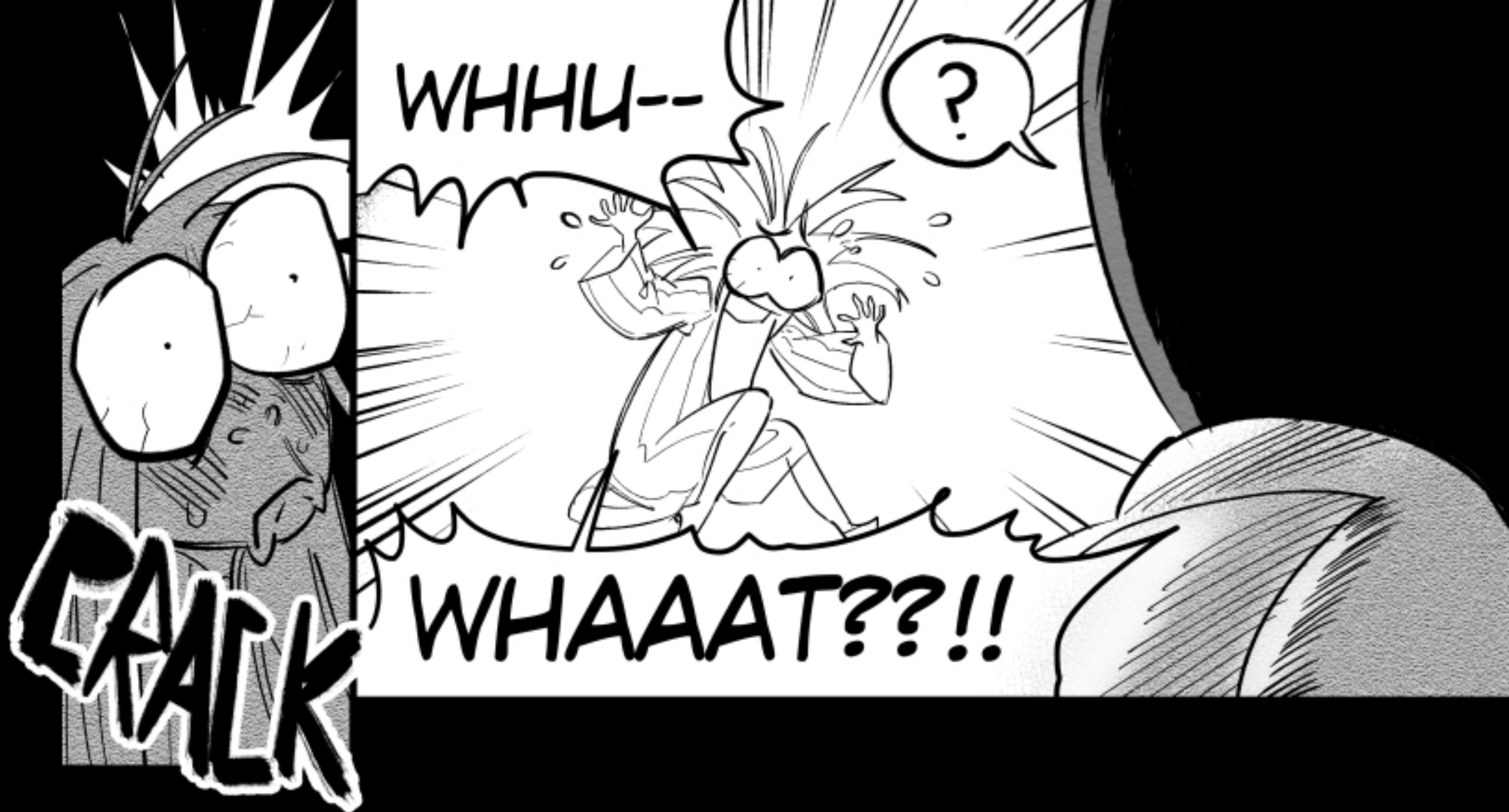
I WANT TO BE WITH YOU



HUM



PRINCESS, YOU SHOULD
TAKE YOUR CLOTHES OFF



WHHU--

?

CRACK

WHAAAT??!!

?

OH- UHM
WAIT!!

III II-T WASN'T FOR THAT!!

I WAS THINKING ON THE SOAKED CLOTHES
AND HOW WE SHOULD DRY IT--

BWAH
AHAAHA
AHAAH

SO YOU WOULDN'T
GET A COLD!



THAT'S WHY I WANTED
TO MAKE A FIRE!!

TZIK TZIK TZIK

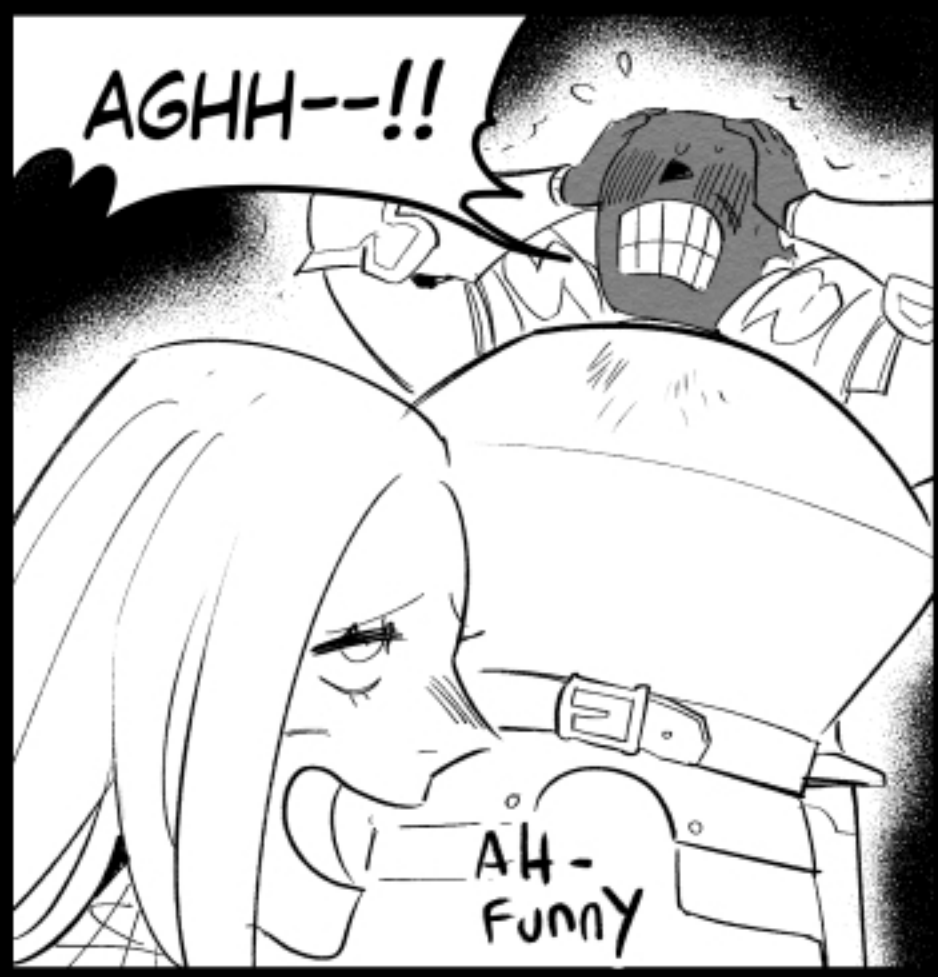
HAHAHAHAHA



MY SINCEREST
APOLOGIES,
PRINCESS!
I-- UH--

Aah...

I CAN SWEAR ON
THE FOUR GODS
THAT WASN'T
MY INTENTION!!

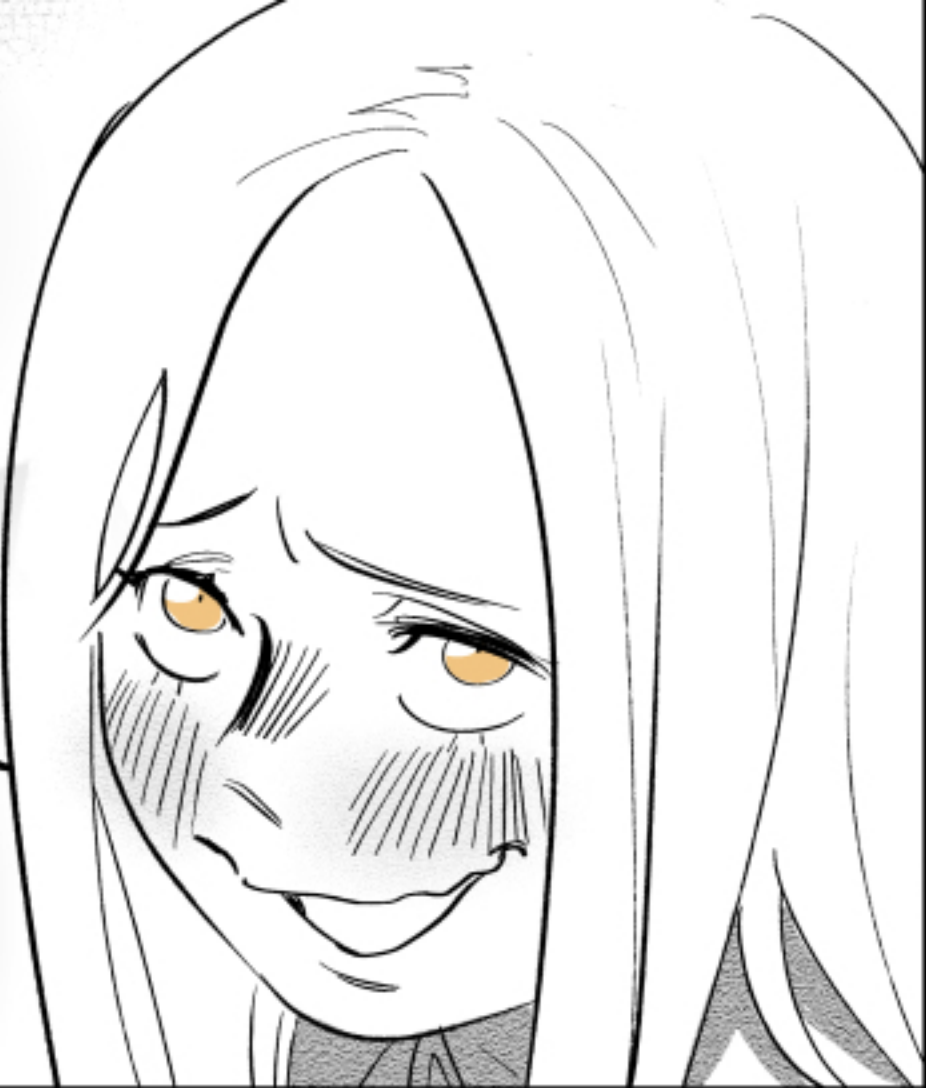


AGHH--!!

AH-
FUNNY



AND WHAT AM I SUPPOSED
TO DO WHILE I'M NAKED?



LOOK AT
EACH OTHER
WHILE WE
WAIT FOR
THE CLOTHES
TO DRY?



KOFF KOFF
No!
No!



BUT, HEY. I'F I'M IN
DANGER OF GETTING A
SEVERE COLD, YOU'RE EVEN
MORE IN DANGER!

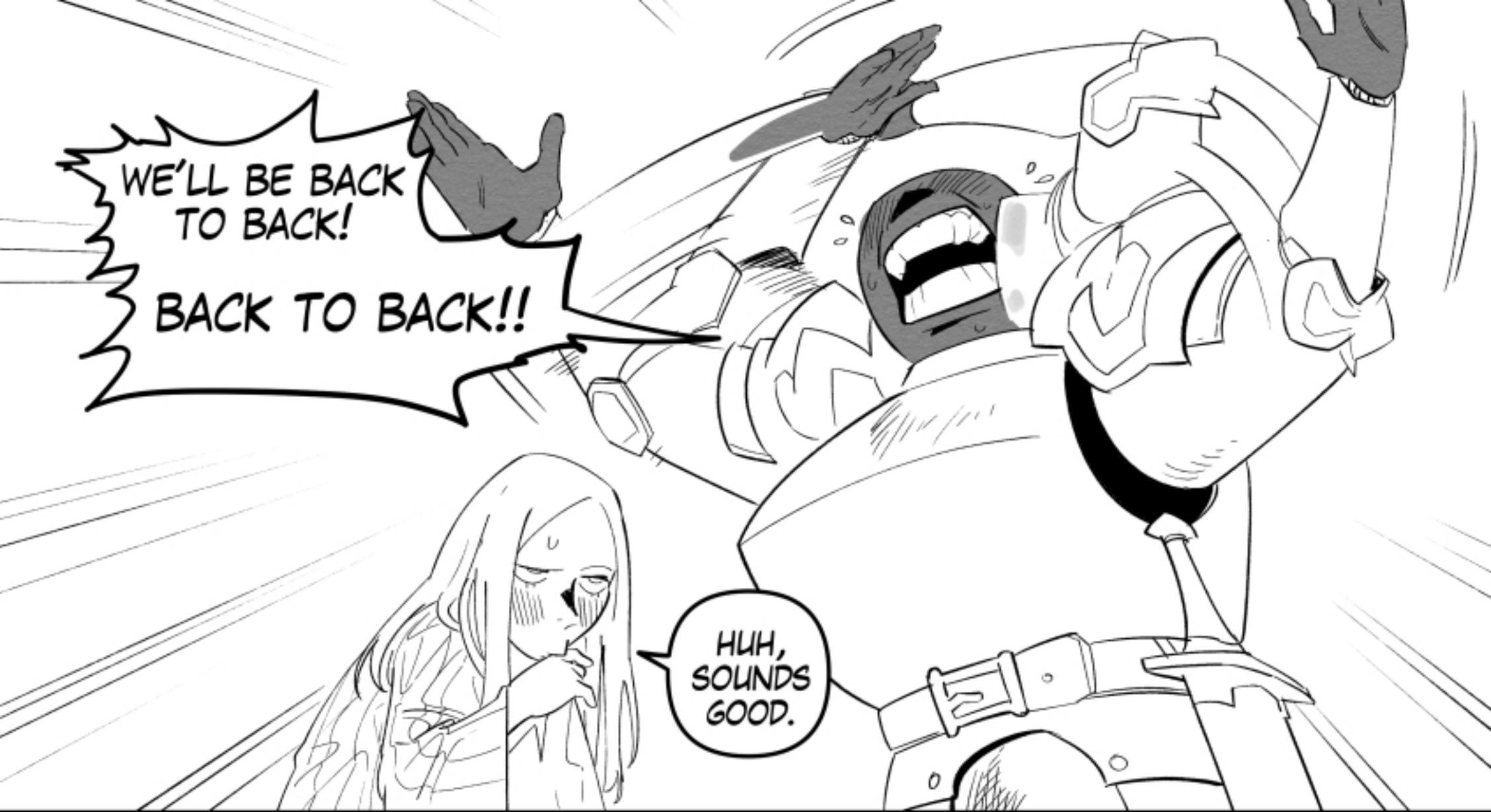
WHICH MEANS YOU
ALSO WOULD NEED
TO UNDRESS AND
PUT YOUR CLOTHES
TO DRY

HOW DO WE
DO THAT?



WE WILL BOTH
BE... YOU KNOW

NAKED.



THIS IS FIRM ENOUGH NOW.

SAFE TO HANG OUR CLOTHES ON.



AND JUST A DAY
LIKE THIS, I WAS
FEASTING ON A
BIG DINNER OF
PORK AND
VEGETABLES

I'M SORRY,
PRINCESS.

HEGE.



I HOPE WE CAN BOTH
HAVE A NICE FEAST
EVENTUALLY

HEGE.

...

AH...



SAY
"AAAH"

AAAH

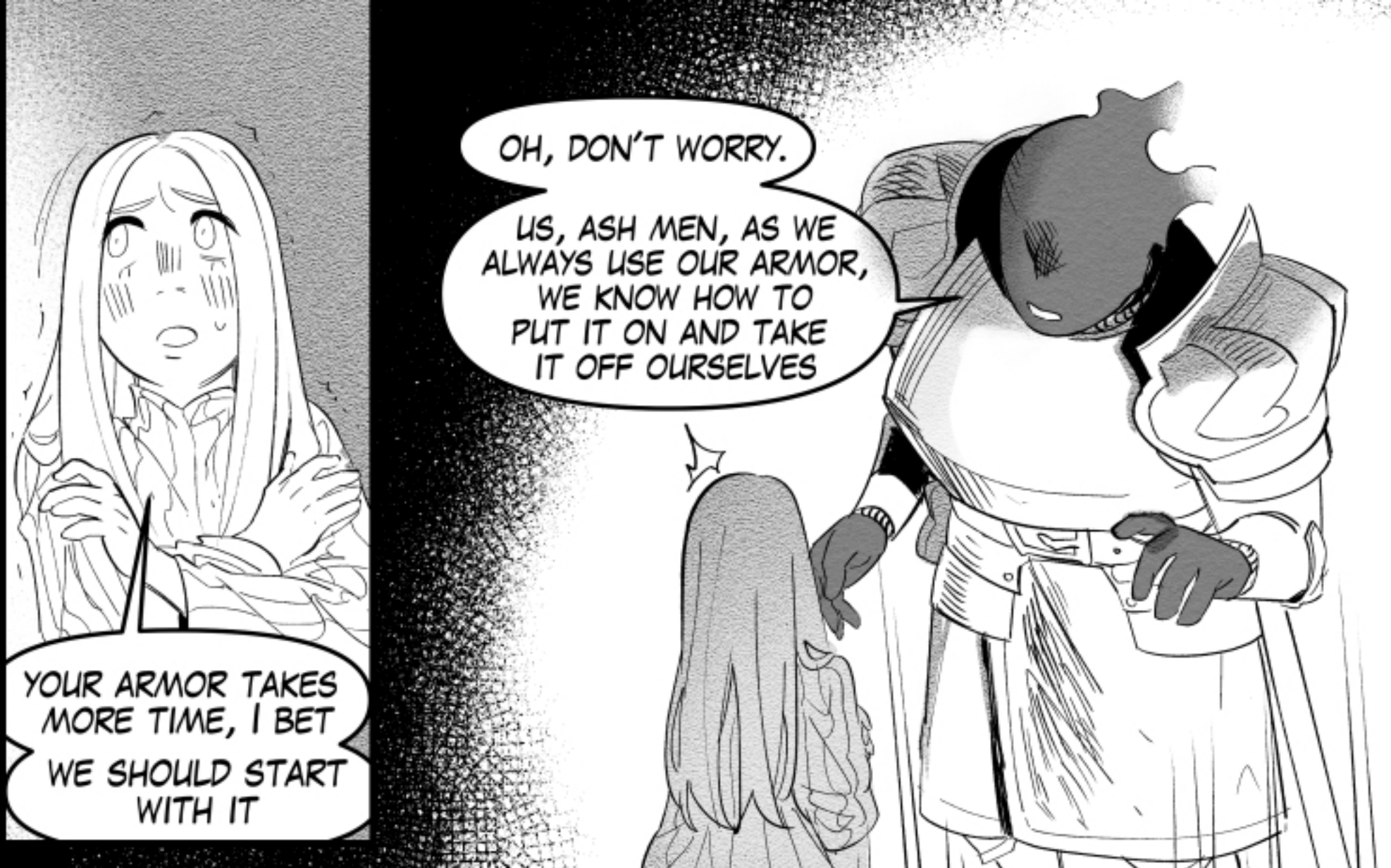
YES...

THAT WOULD BE
NICE



WELL.





OH, DON'T WORRY.

US, ASH MEN, AS WE
ALWAYS USE OUR ARMOR,
WE KNOW HOW TO
PUT IT ON AND TAKE
IT OFF OURSELVES

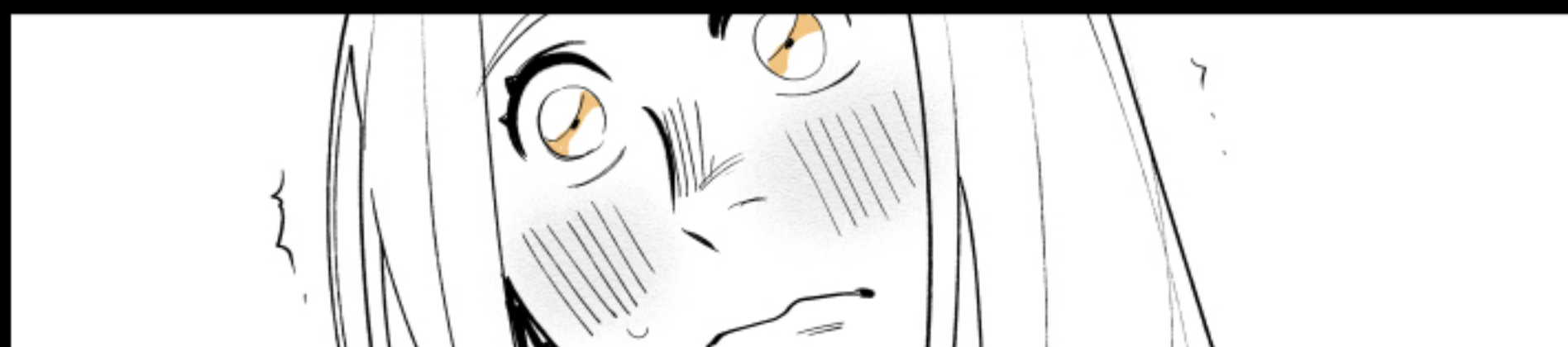
YOUR ARMOR TAKES
MORE TIME, I BET
WE SHOULD START
WITH IT

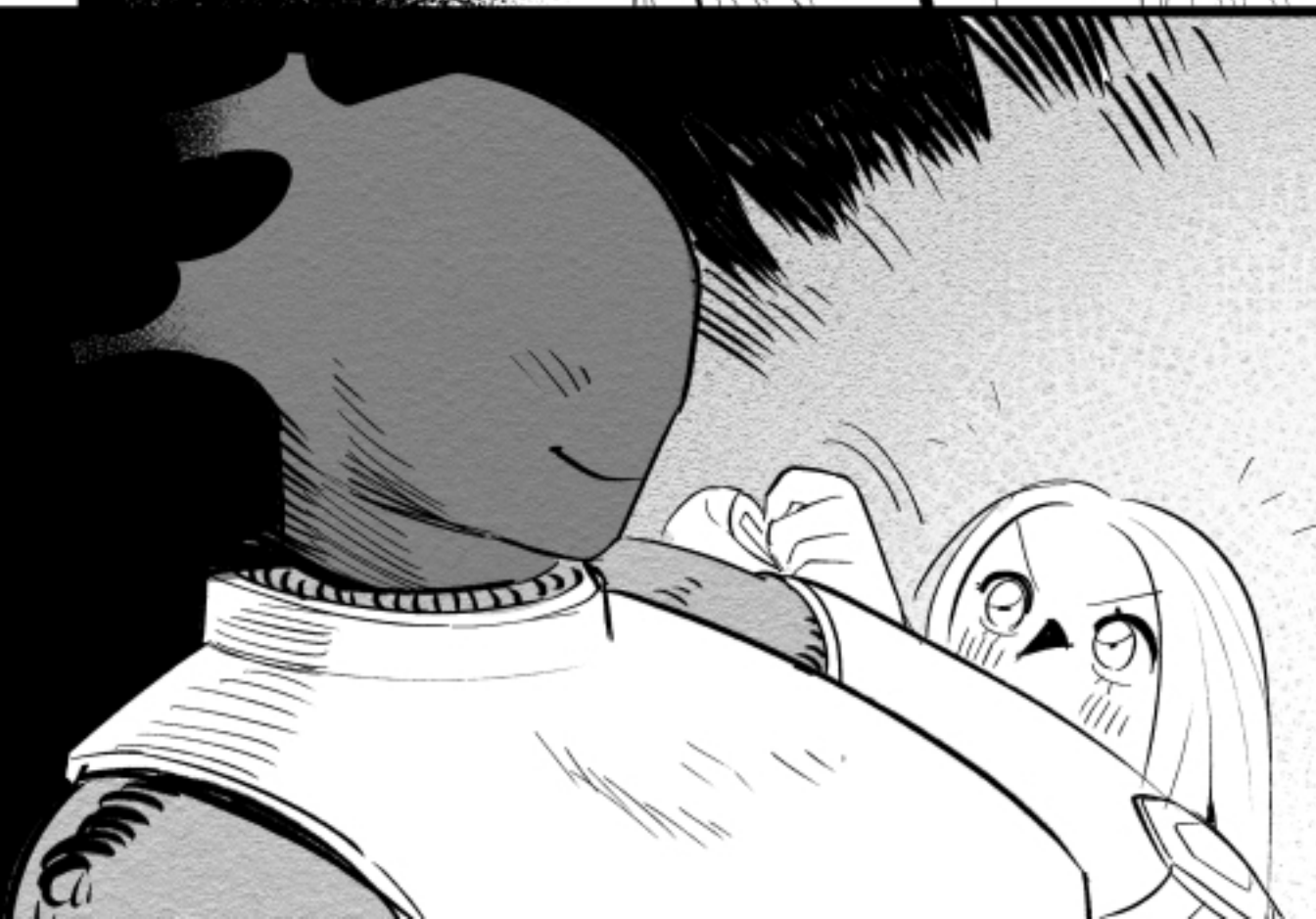


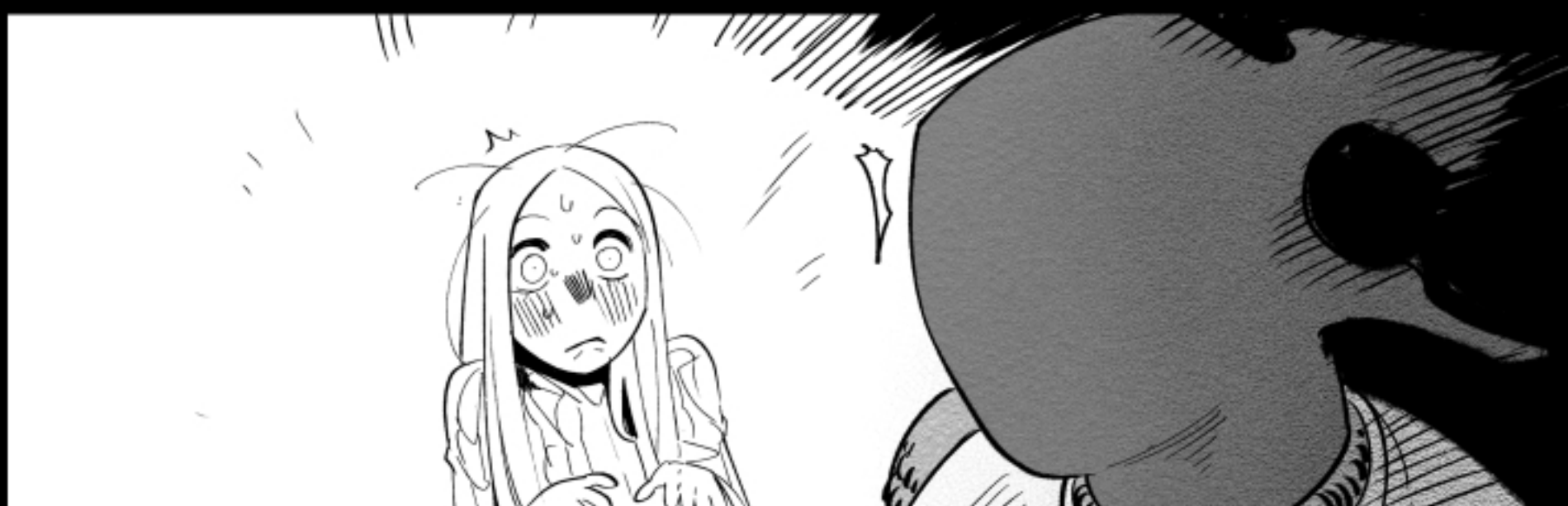
BUT...

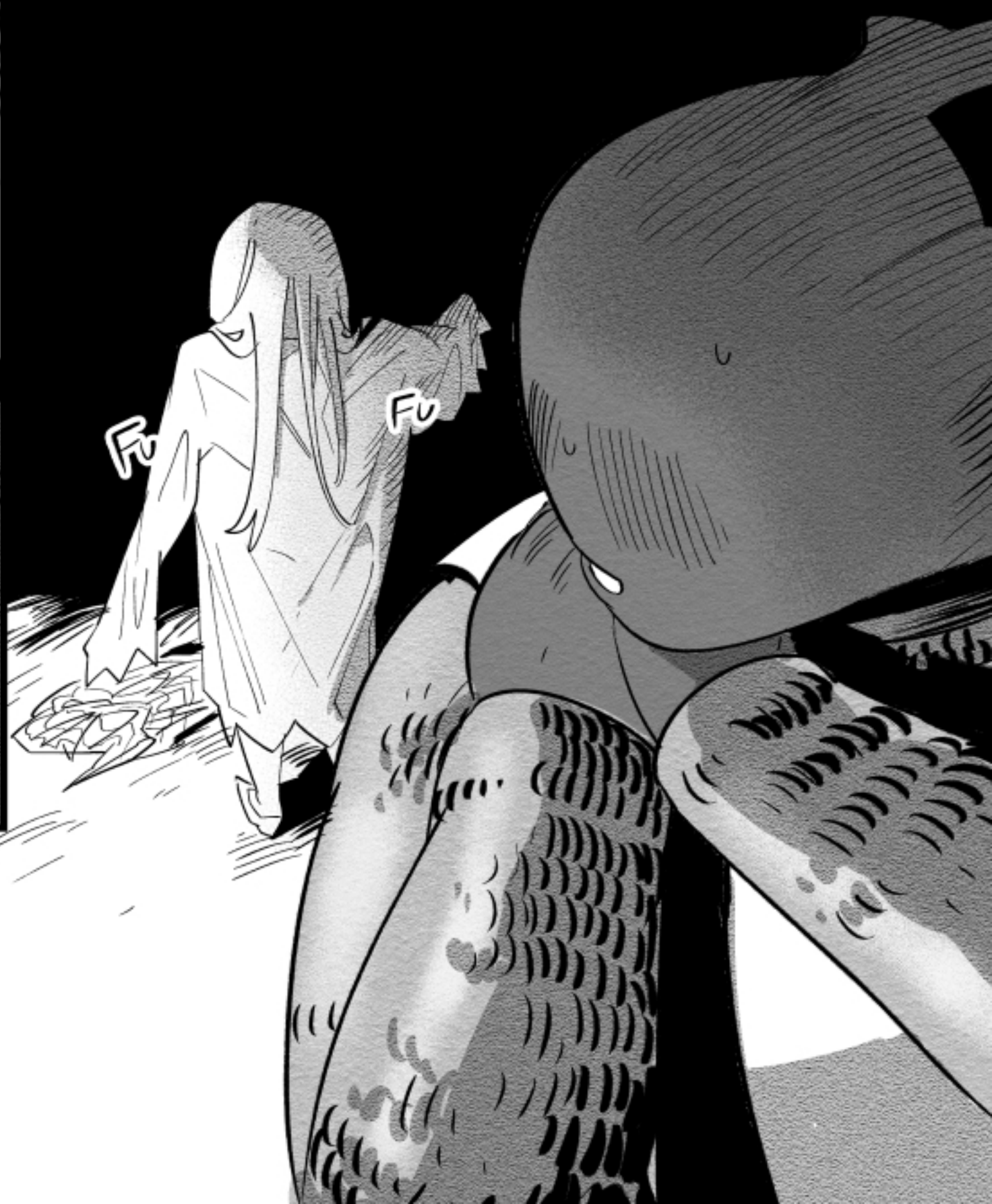
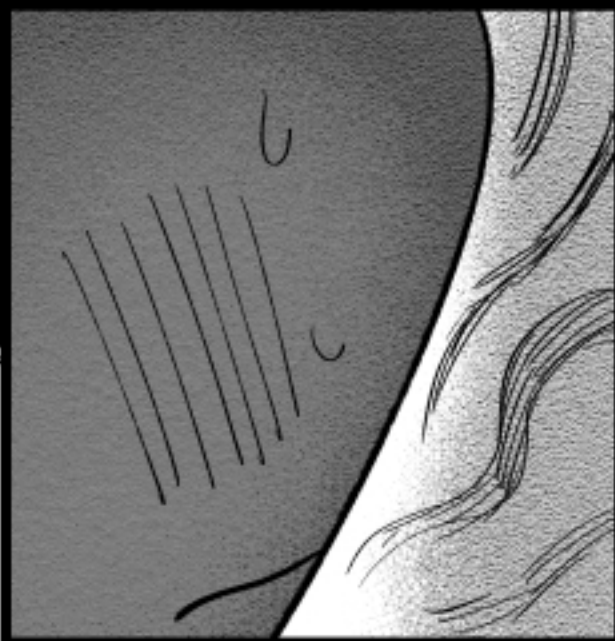


BUT YOU CAN
HELP ME, IF YOU WANT.









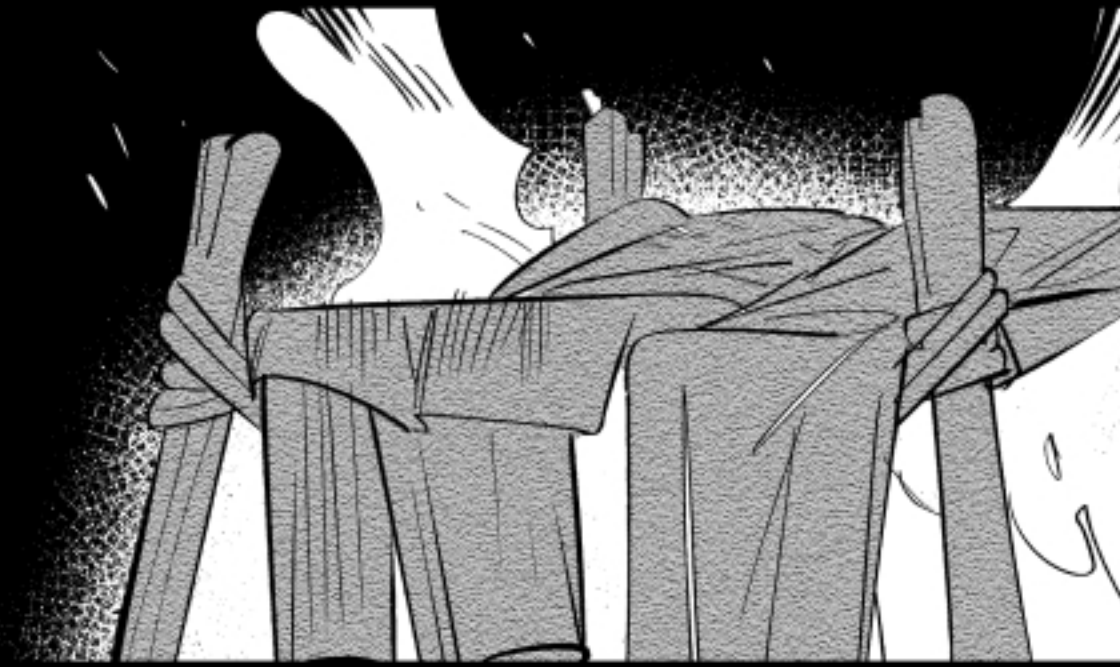


FUCK.

I SHOULDN'T
HAVE--







I INSIST IT SHOULD HANG YOUR
CLOTHES FIRST

RICARD!

I HAVE A GOOD
BODY TEMPERATURE

AND A COLD WON'T
KILL ME AS EASILY
AS YOU!



YOU SHOULDN'T BE
PUTTING ME FIRST... I'M JUST A...

AND BECAUSE
I LIKE YOU
A LOT.

AND I'M A
PRINCESS!
I DECIDE WHAT
TO DO

NOW YOU'RE A
PRINCESS...

ARE YOU HUNGRY?

NOT REALLY.
ALL OF WHAT'S
HAPPENED TOOK
AWAY MY APPETITE.

I PROMISE YOU
TOMORROW MORNING
I'LL HAVE A GOOD
BREAKFAST READY.

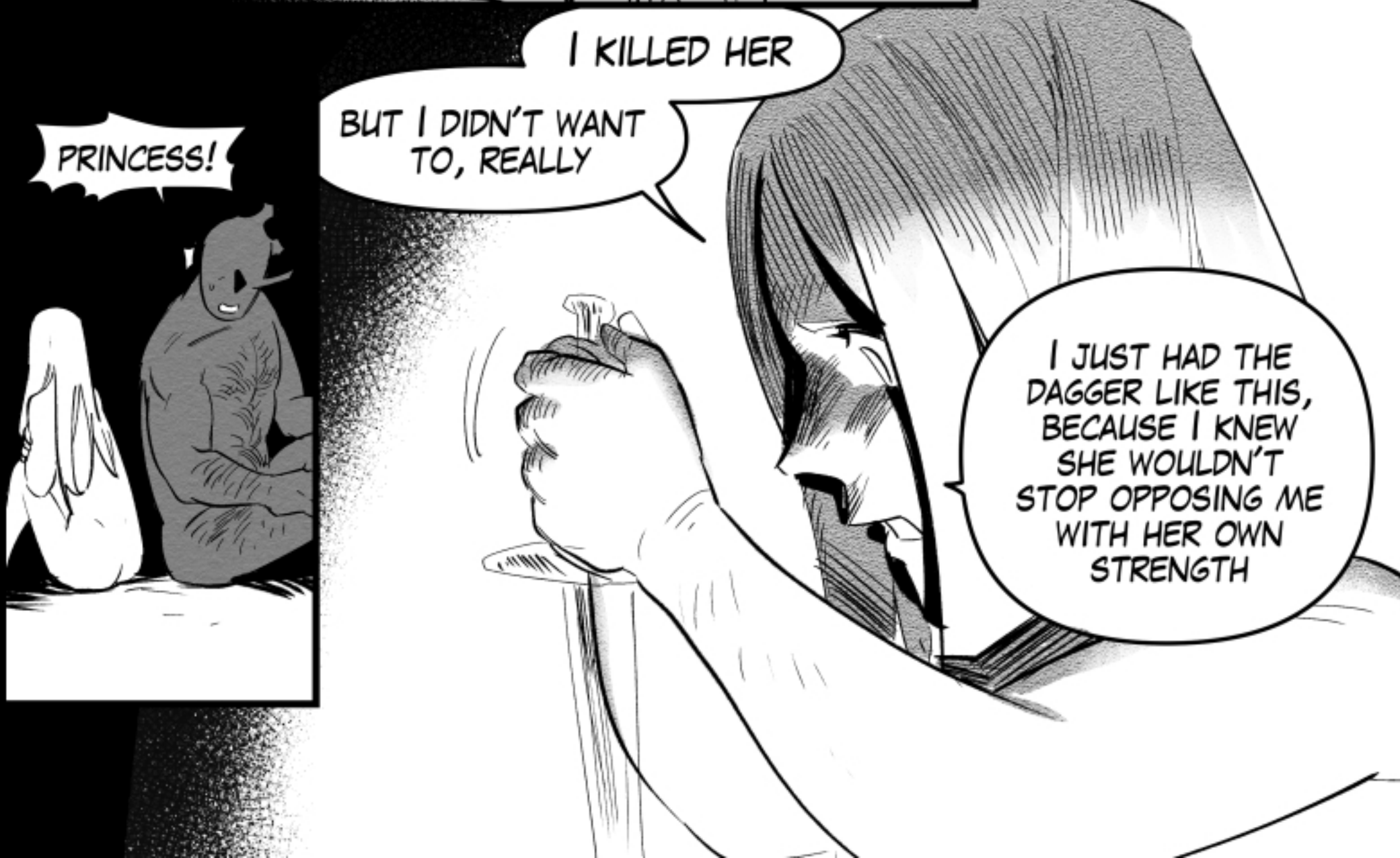
IT'S ALRIGHT,
RICARD.

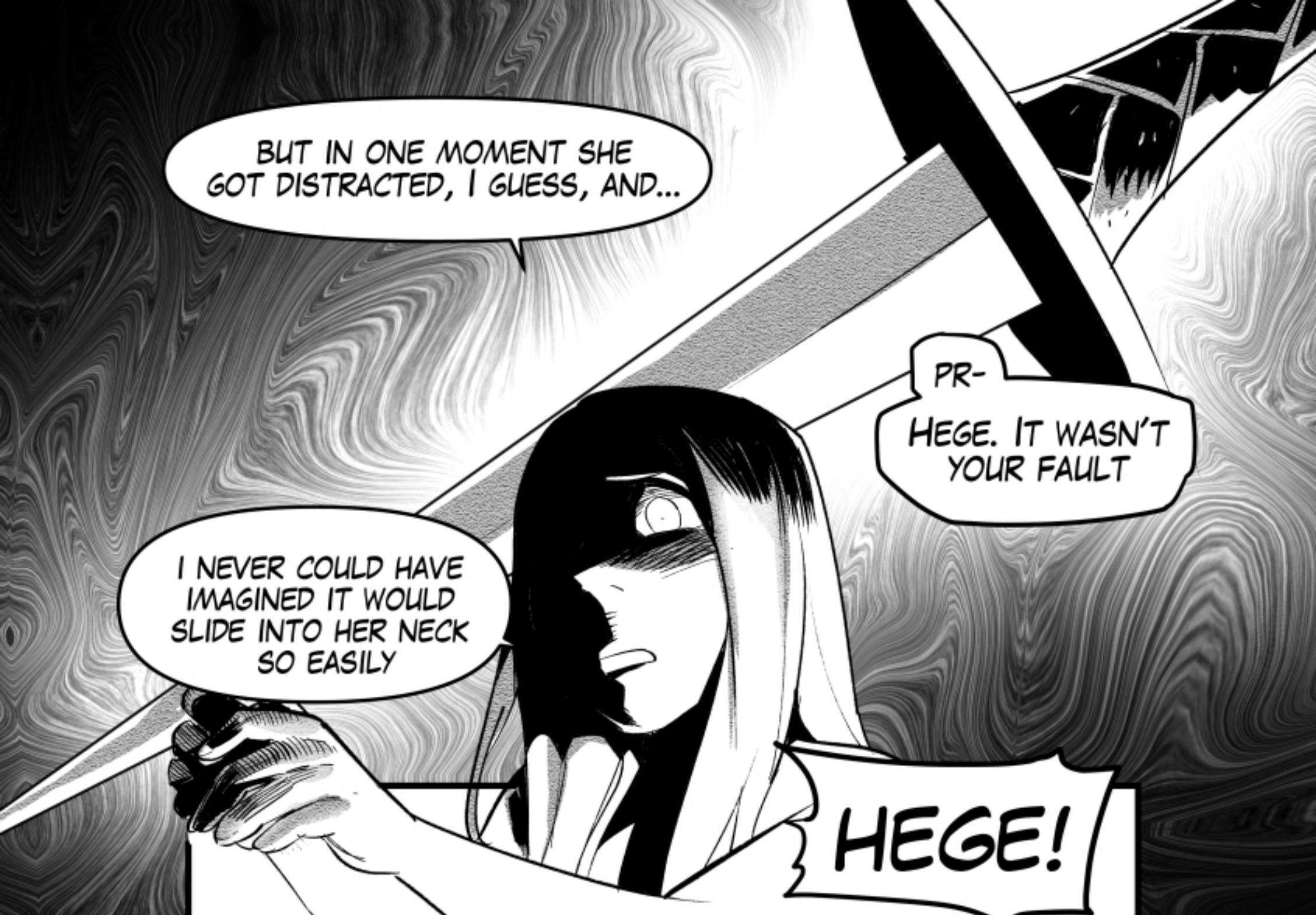
SHE...

DIDN'T
APOLOGIZE.

KST

KST



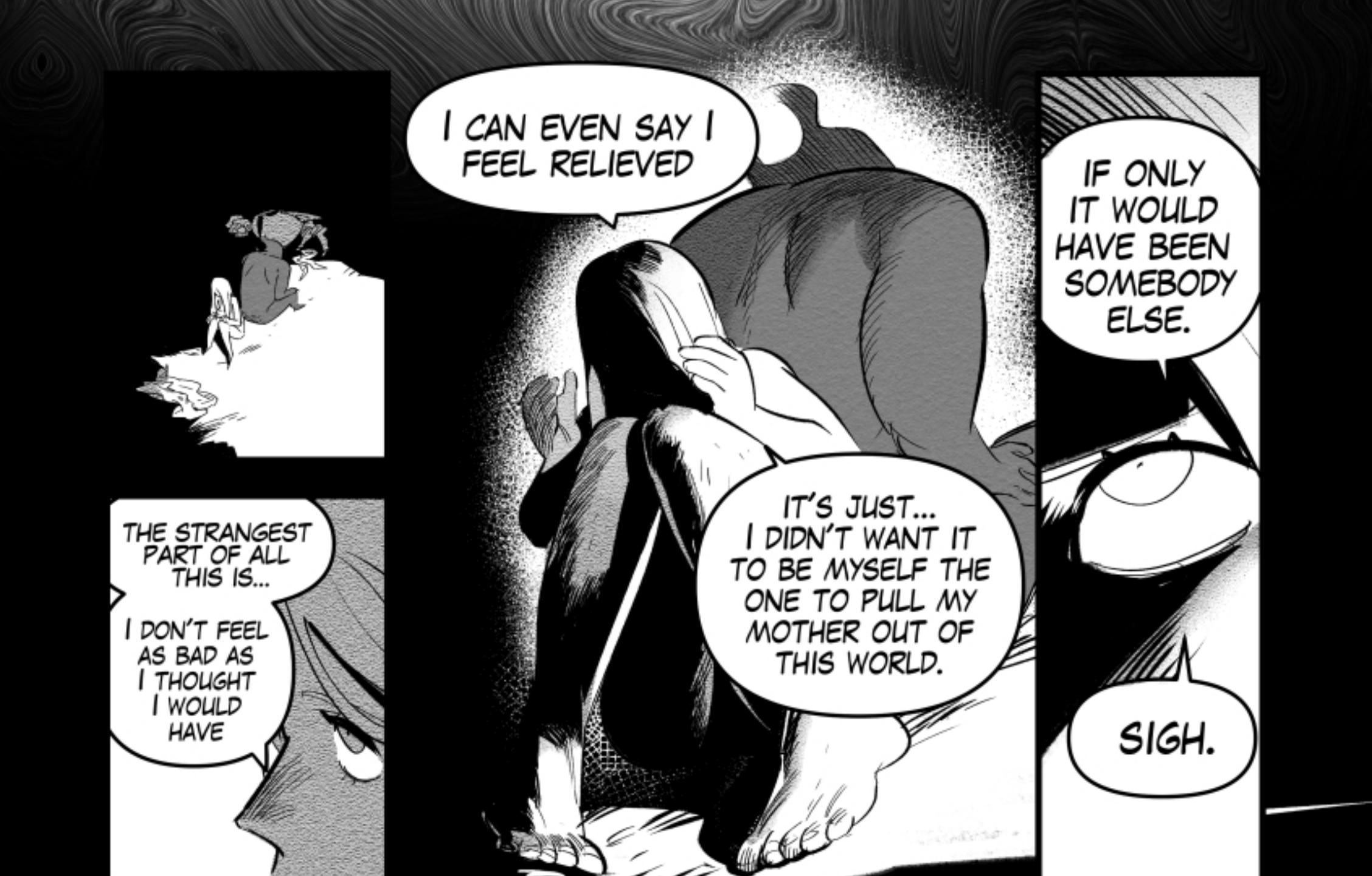


BUT IN ONE MOMENT SHE
GOT DISTRACTED, I GUESS, AND...

PR-
HEGE. IT WASN'T
YOUR FAULT

I NEVER COULD HAVE
IMAGINED IT WOULD
SLIDE INTO HER NECK
SO EASILY

HEGE!



I CAN EVEN SAY I
FEEL RELIEVED

IF ONLY
IT WOULD
HAVE BEEN
SOMEBODY
ELSE.

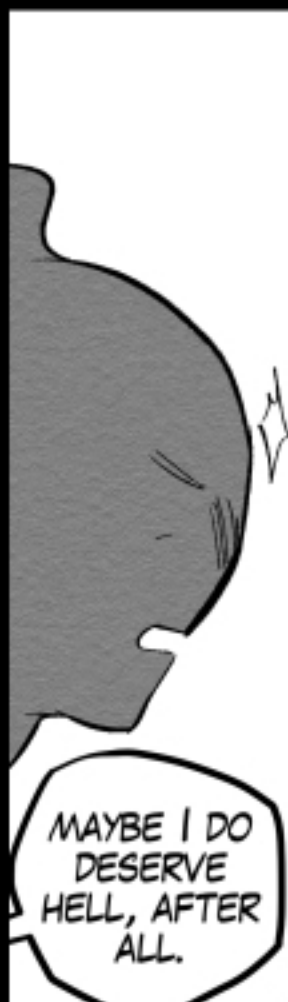


THE STRANGEST
PART OF ALL
THIS IS...

I DON'T FEEL
AS BAD AS
I THOUGHT
I WOULD HAVE

IT'S JUST...
I DIDN'T WANT IT
TO BE MYSELF THE
ONE TO PULL MY
MOTHER OUT OF
THIS WORLD.

SIGH.



MAYBE I DO
DESERVE
HELL, AFTER
ALL.



IF YOU'RE GOING TO
HELL, I'M COMING
WITH YOU.

I'VE TAKEN MORE
LIFES THAN YOU

BUT THAT'S
YOUR JOB



WOULD IT BE
RELEVANT
SOMETHING
LIKE A JOB
TO THE FOUR
GODS?

H.M.



THIS IS ALMOST DRY,
I'LL TAKE IT OUT.

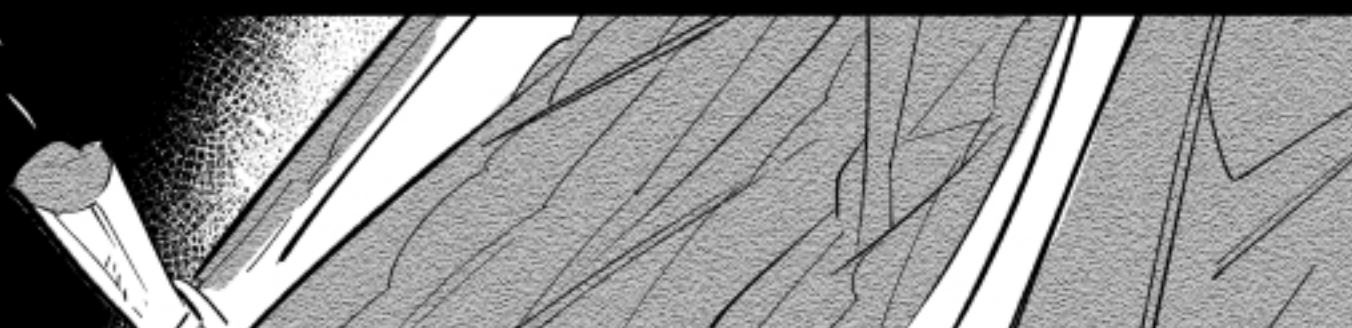


B-BUT
"ALMOST DRY"
DOESN'T MEAN
"DRY"!

IT'S GOOD
ENOUGH.

WITH A FIRE LIKE THIS, WE
DON'T HAVE THE TIME TO
WAIT FOR THIS TO DRY
COMPLETELY

PLEASE, NOW HAND
ME YOUR CLOTHES.



LOOKS LIKE IT'S
STILL HUMID

A BIT.
BUT BETTER
THAN HAVING
NOTHING ON





ARE YOU
COLD?

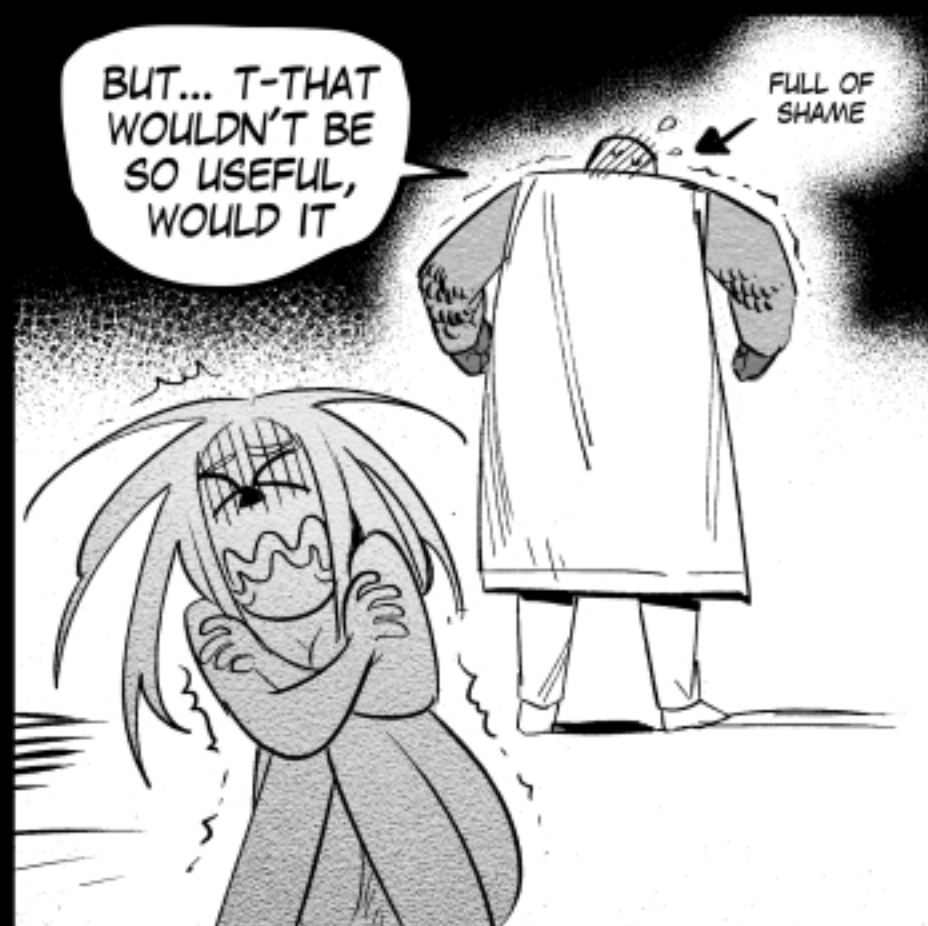
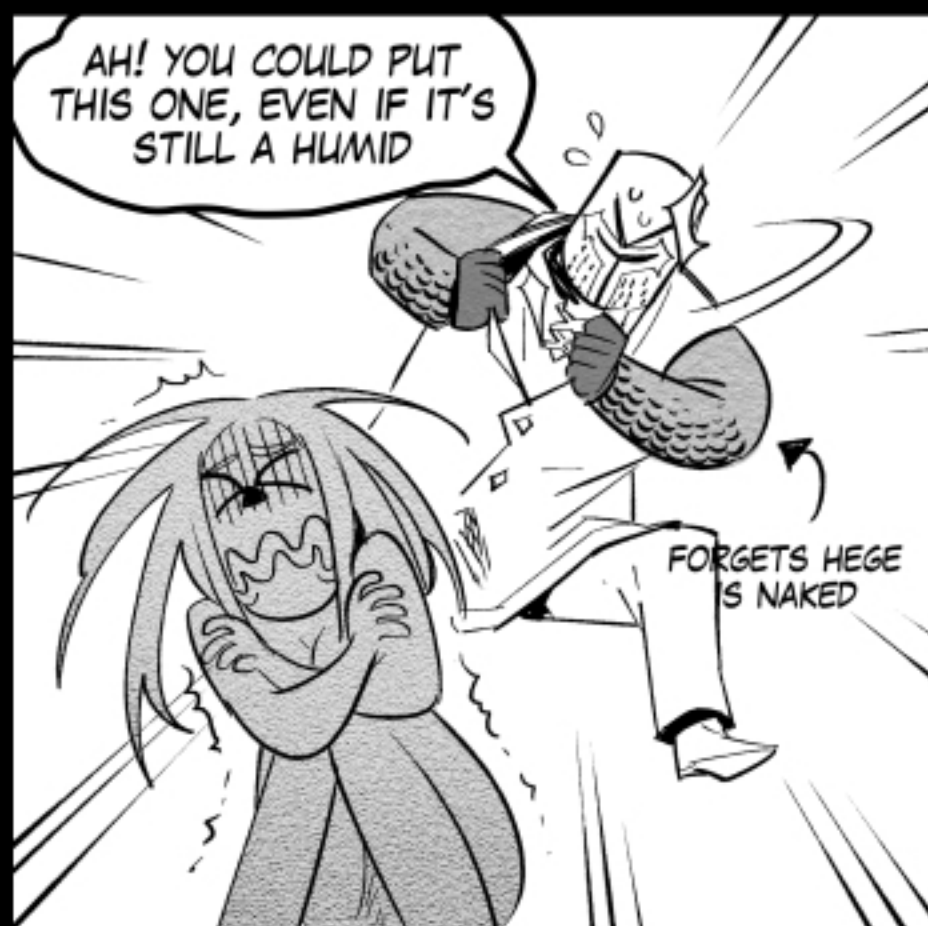


NOT REALLY, I'LL
BE BETTER WITH
THIS ON.

DO YOU WANT
ME TO HUG YOU?



I'M... FINE.

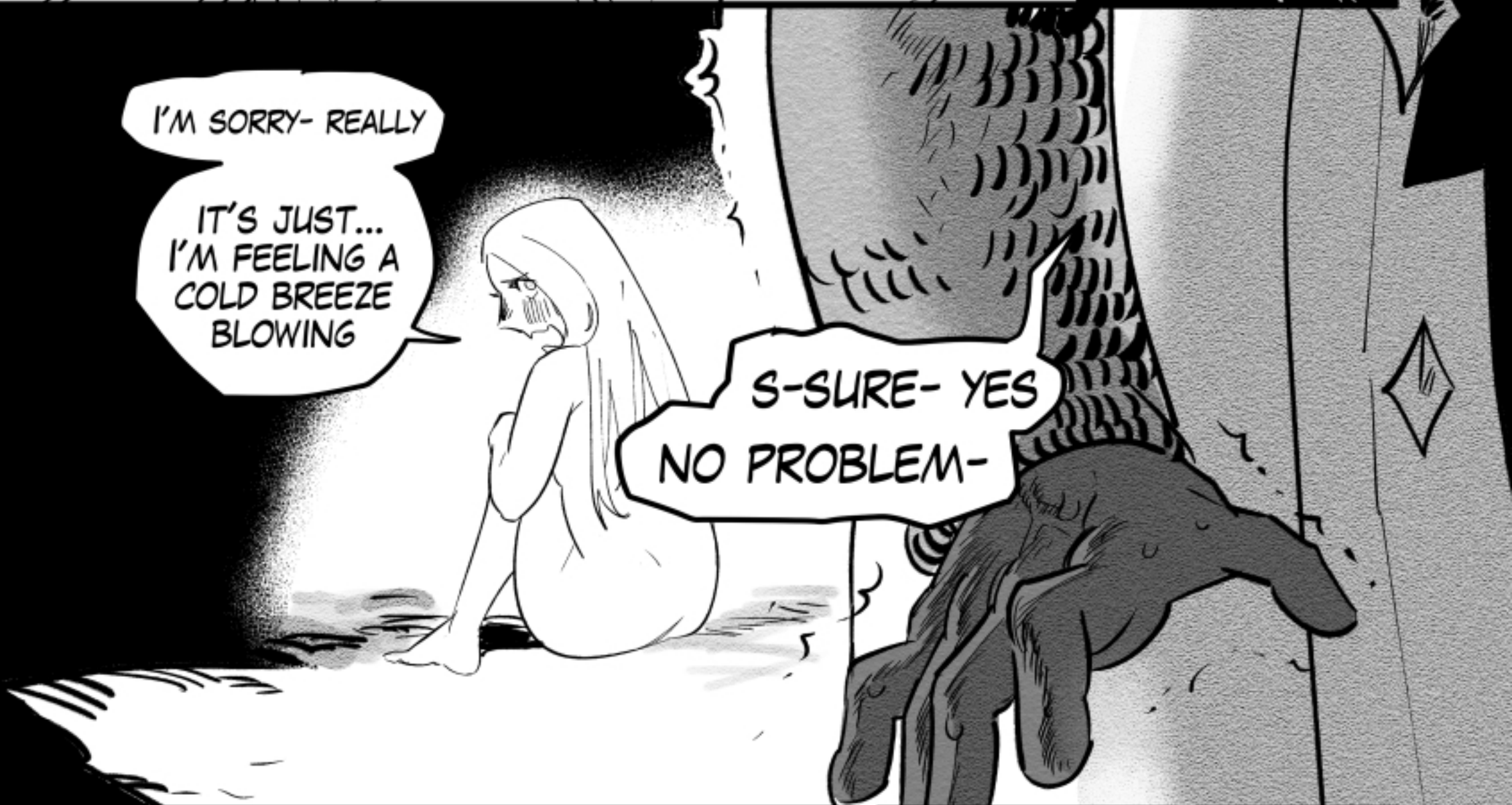




WOULD
YOU
HUG ME?!



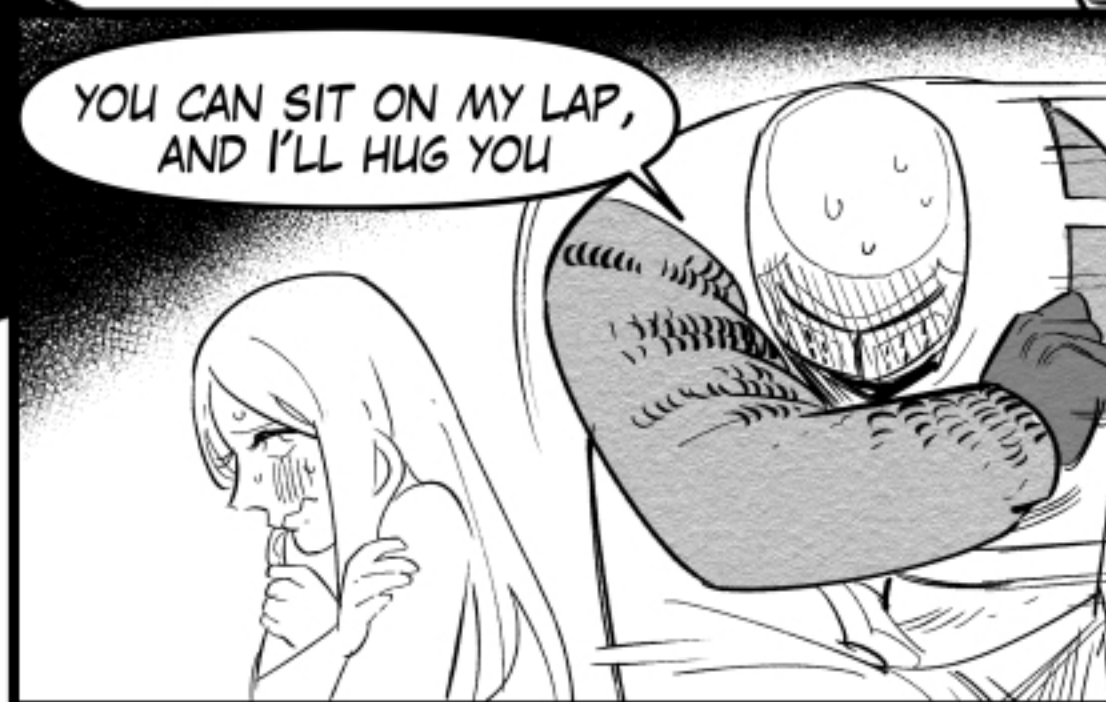
AH.



I'M SORRY- REALLY

IT'S JUST...
I'M FEELING A
COLD BREEZE
BLOWING

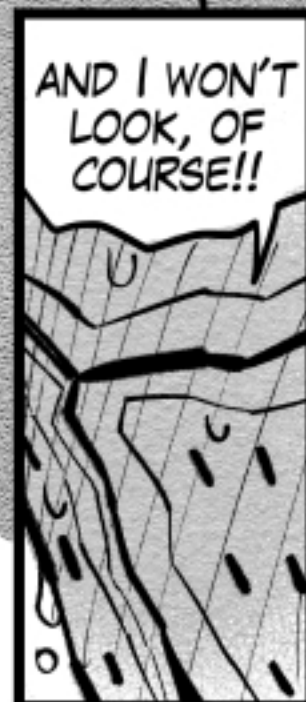
S-SURE- YES
NO PROBLEM-



YOU CAN SIT ON MY LAP,
AND I'LL HUG YOU



HOPEFULLY
YOU'LL FEEL
WARMER THAT
WAY.



AND I WON'T
LOOK, OF
COURSE!!



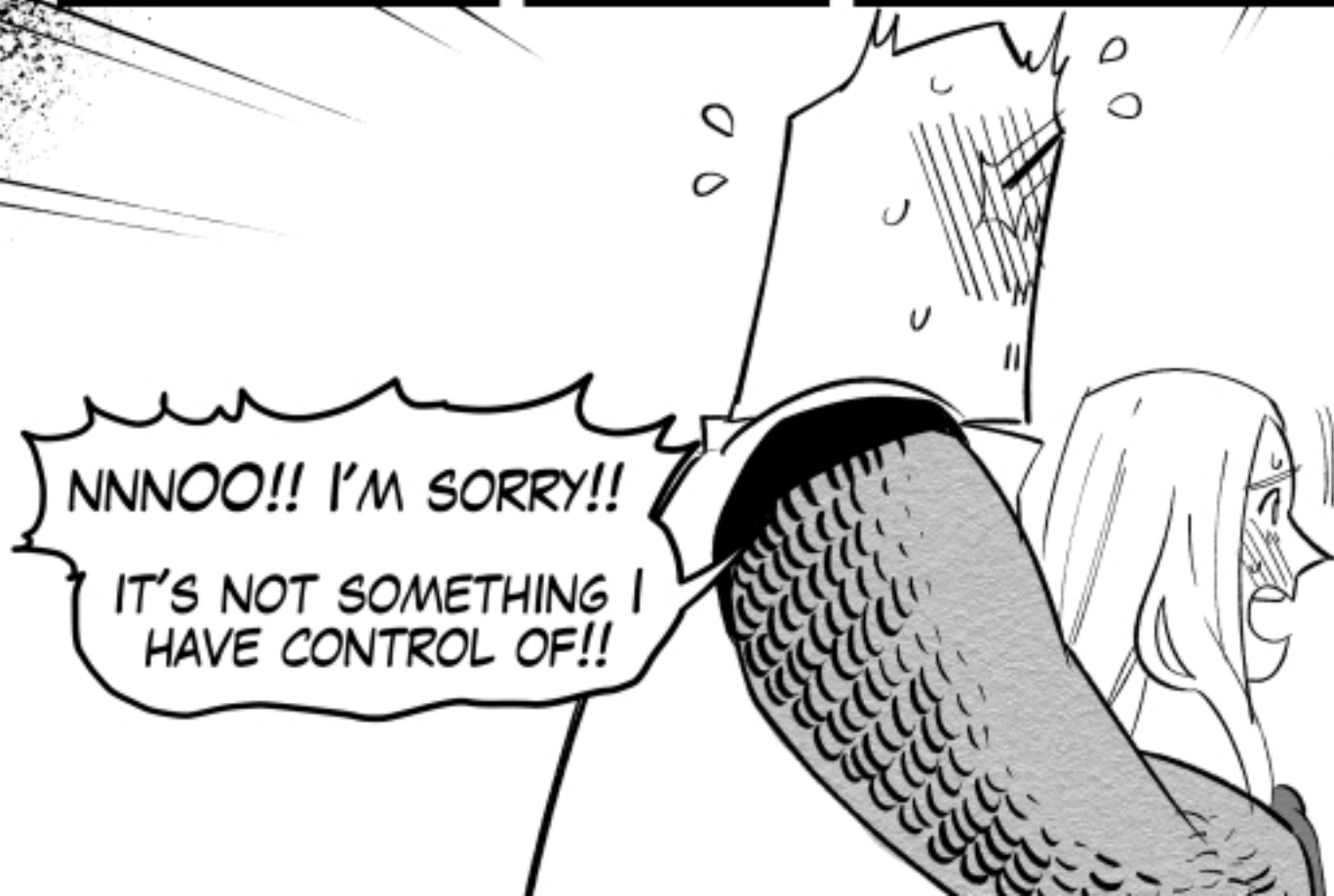
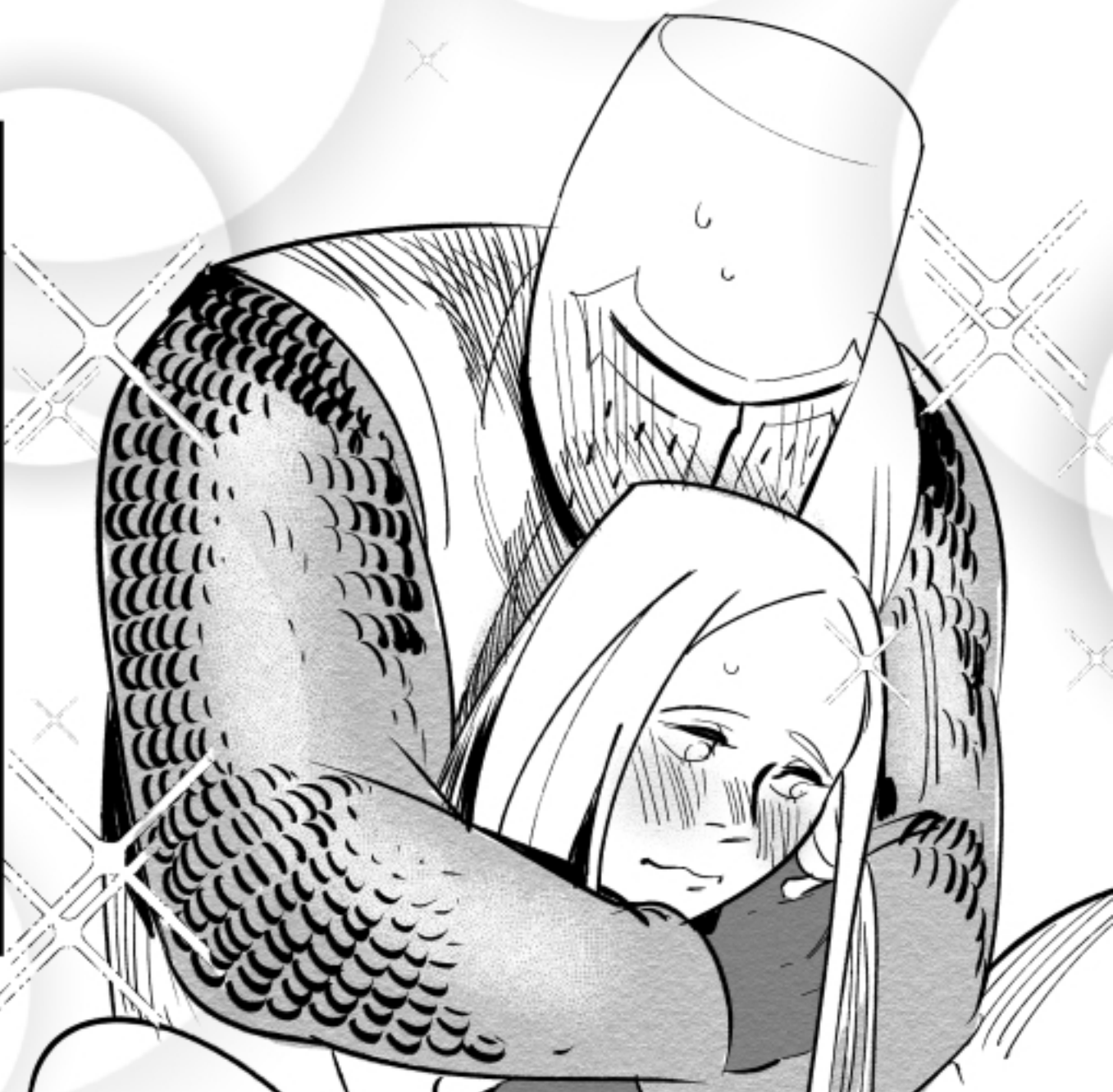
I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS. I JUST KISSED HER MOMENTS EARLIER.
KISSED HER!! AND NOW I WILL EMBRACE HEGE'S NAKED BODY-

HOW WILL I BE ABLE TO KNOW I WON'T TRY TO
TOUCH HER INAPPROPRIATELY, INFLUENCED BY DEMONS
AND EVIL THOUGHTS!

N-NO... I WON'T ALLOW IT

I MUST PROTECT
PRINCESS HEGE.







IT'S NOT
EASY HAVING A
NAKED WOMAN
IN YOUR ARMS,
HUH?

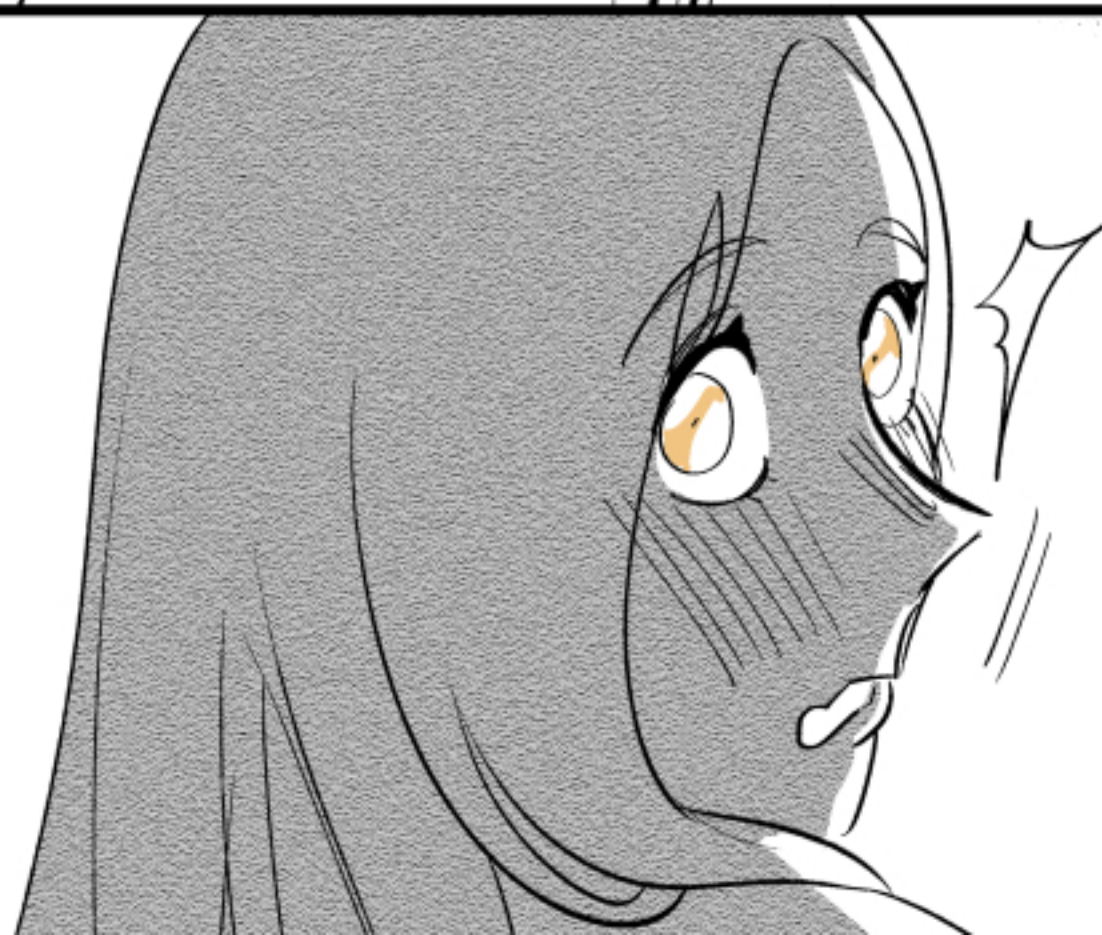


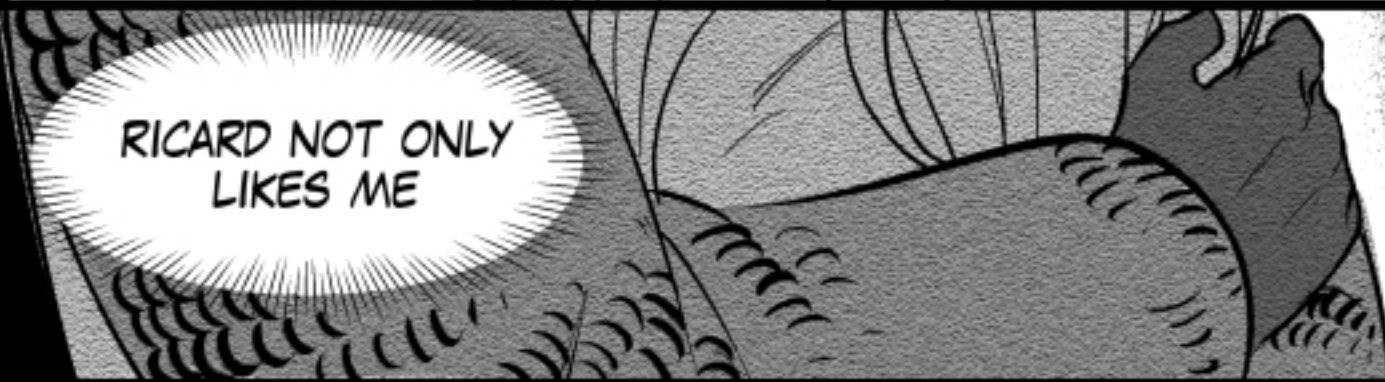
AH-

HAHA...



WOULDN'T
HAPPEN WITH
ANY WOMAN.





RICARD NOT ONLY
LIKES ME



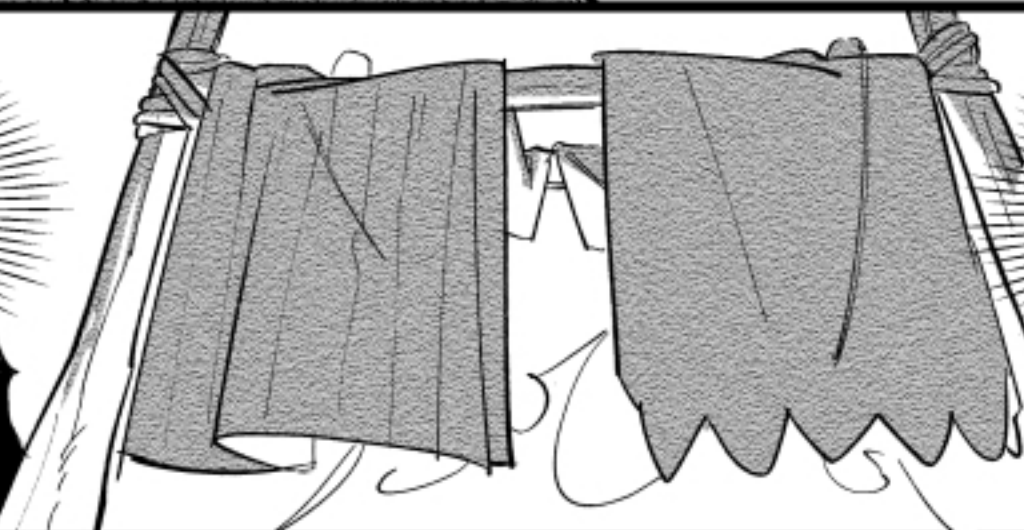
HE ALSO



WANTS ME



AS I DO
TOO



AND NOW
...

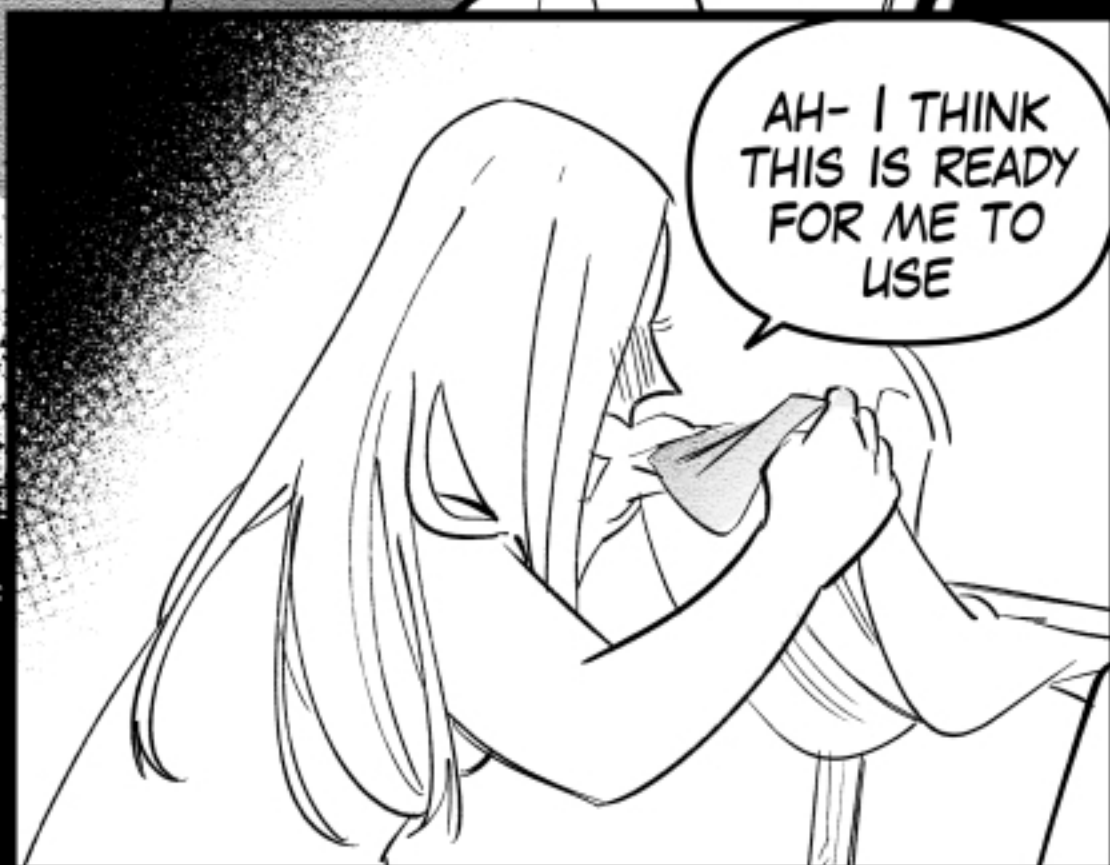
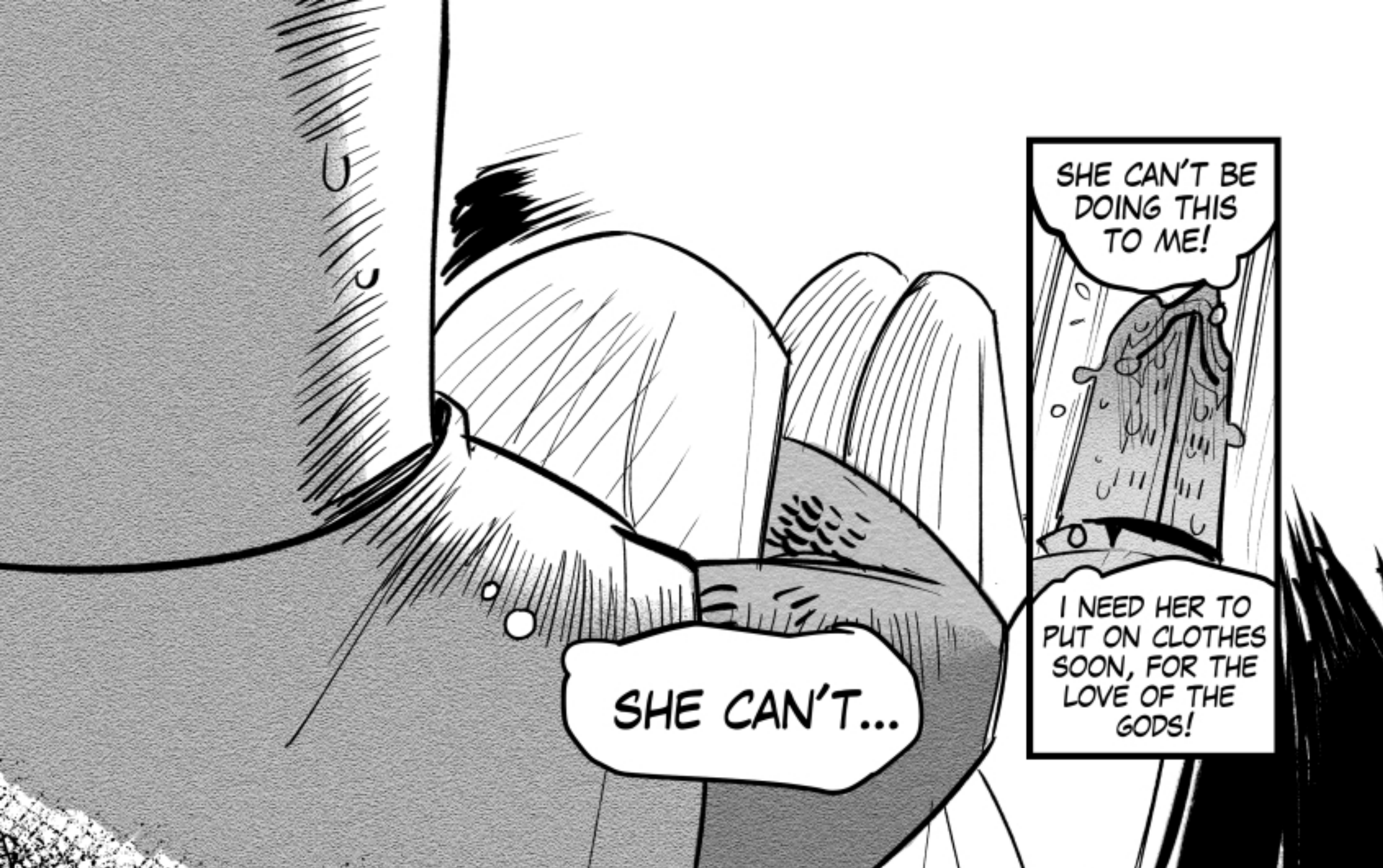


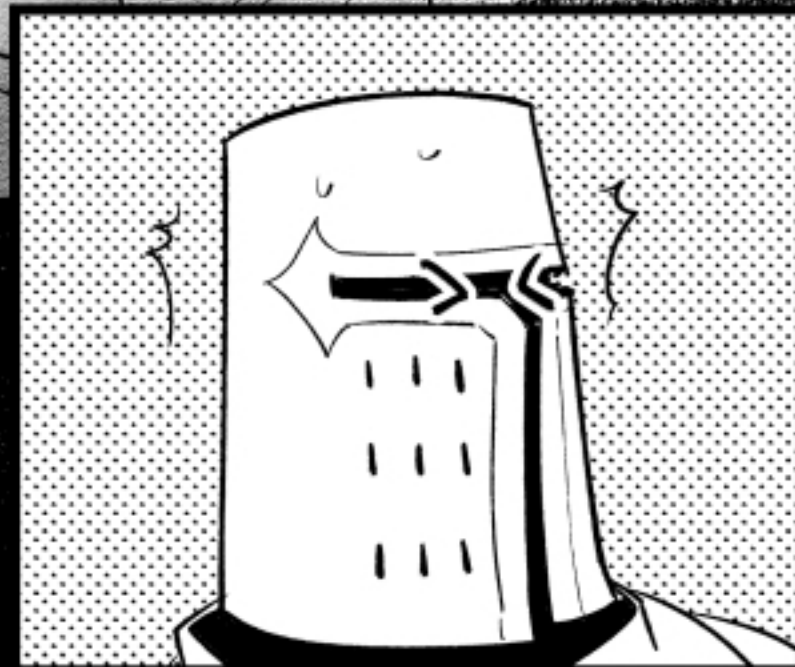
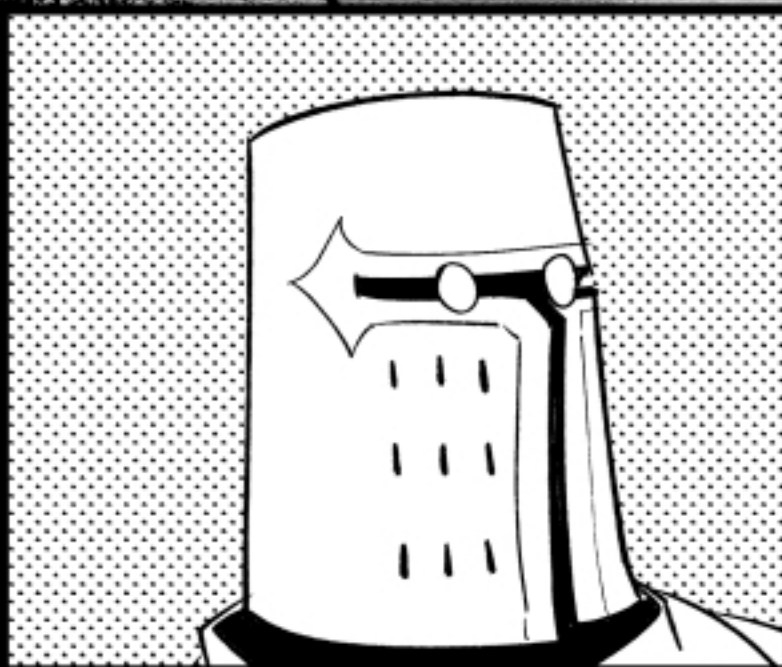
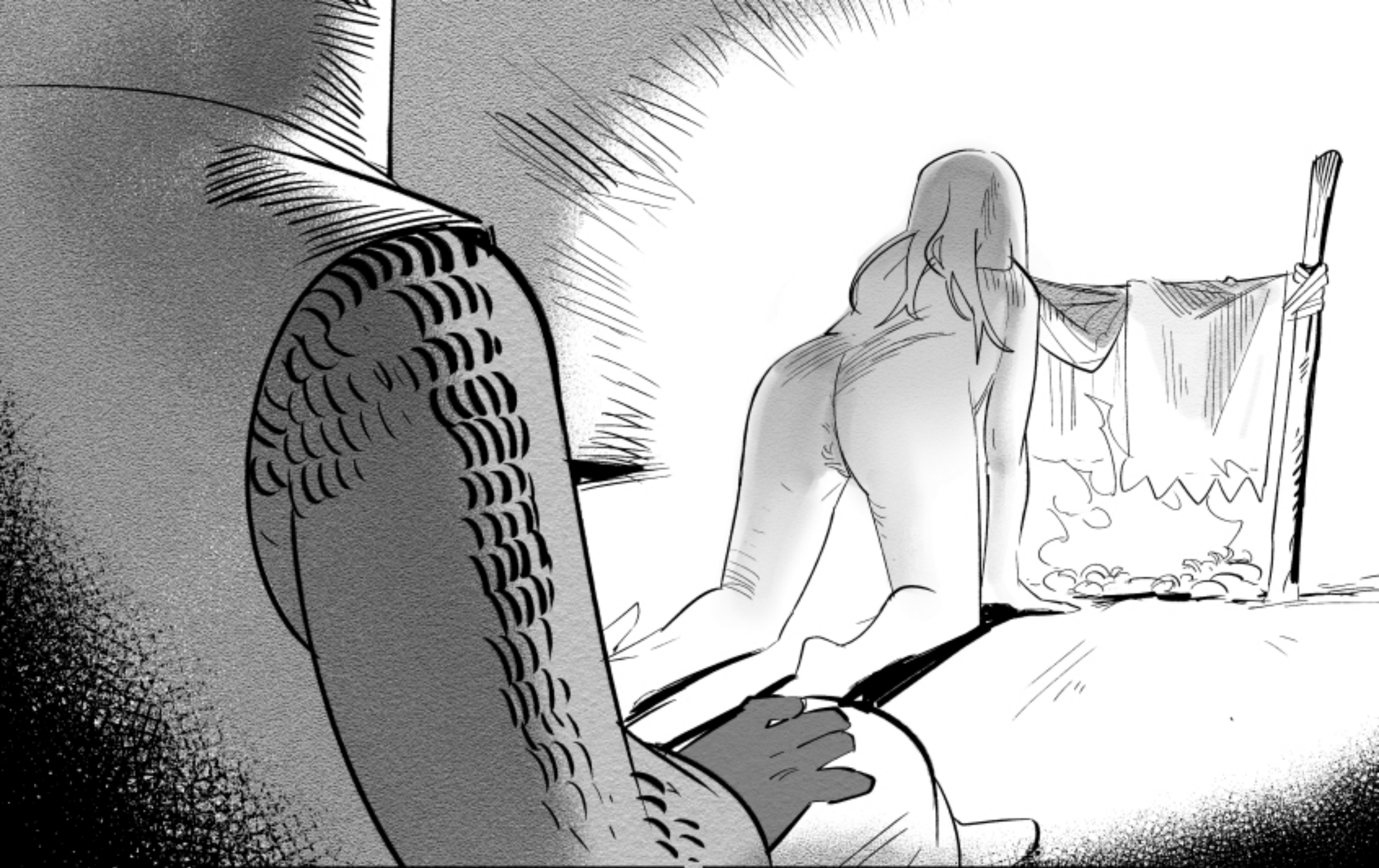
I HAVE HIS
LARGE ARMS
AROUND MY
NAKED BODY

THE ARMS OF
THIS MAN
WHO ALWAYS
SHOWS HIMSELF
PROFESSIONAL
AND CONTAINED



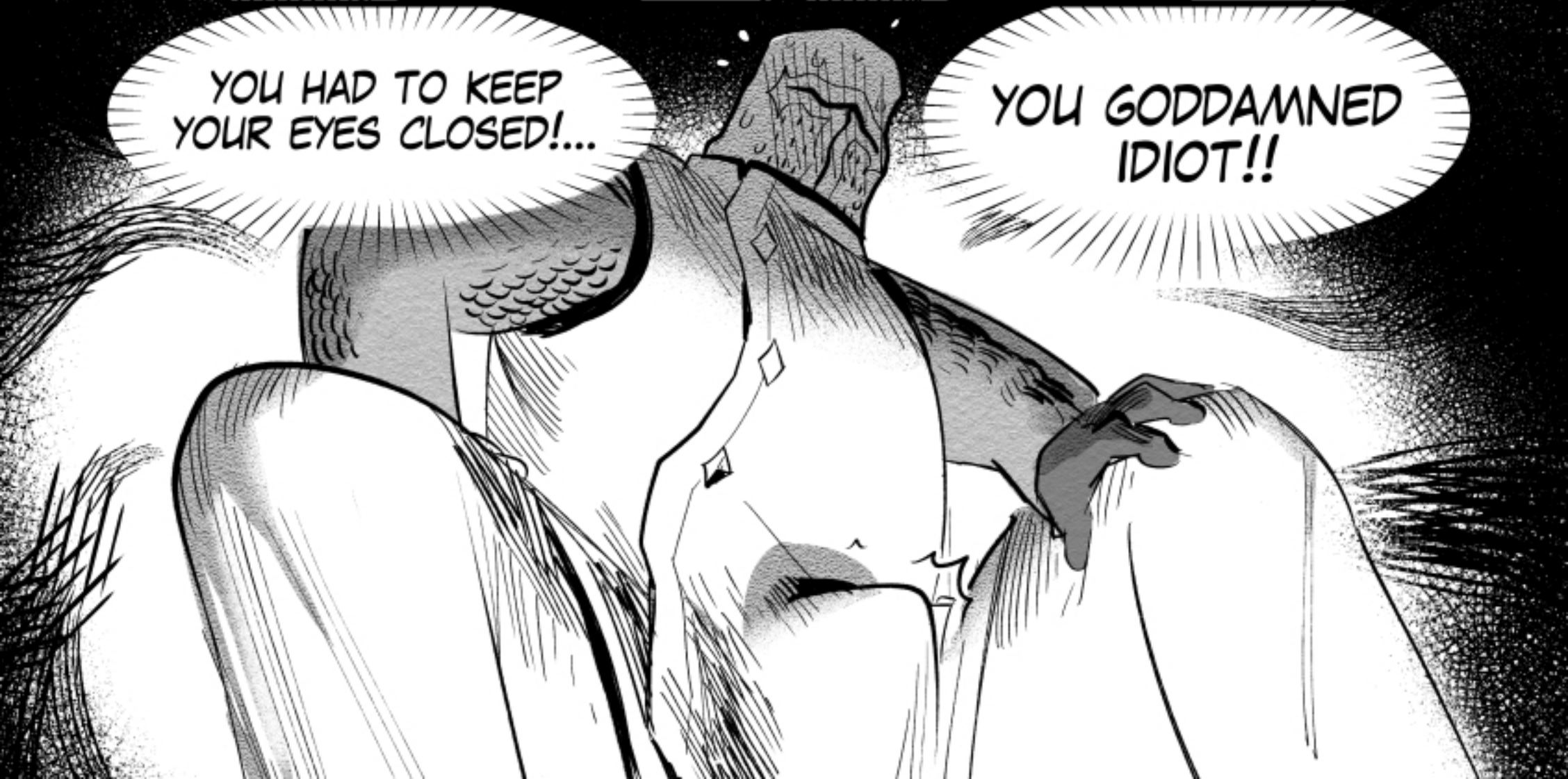
HIS BODY
TELLING ME
HIS TRUTH

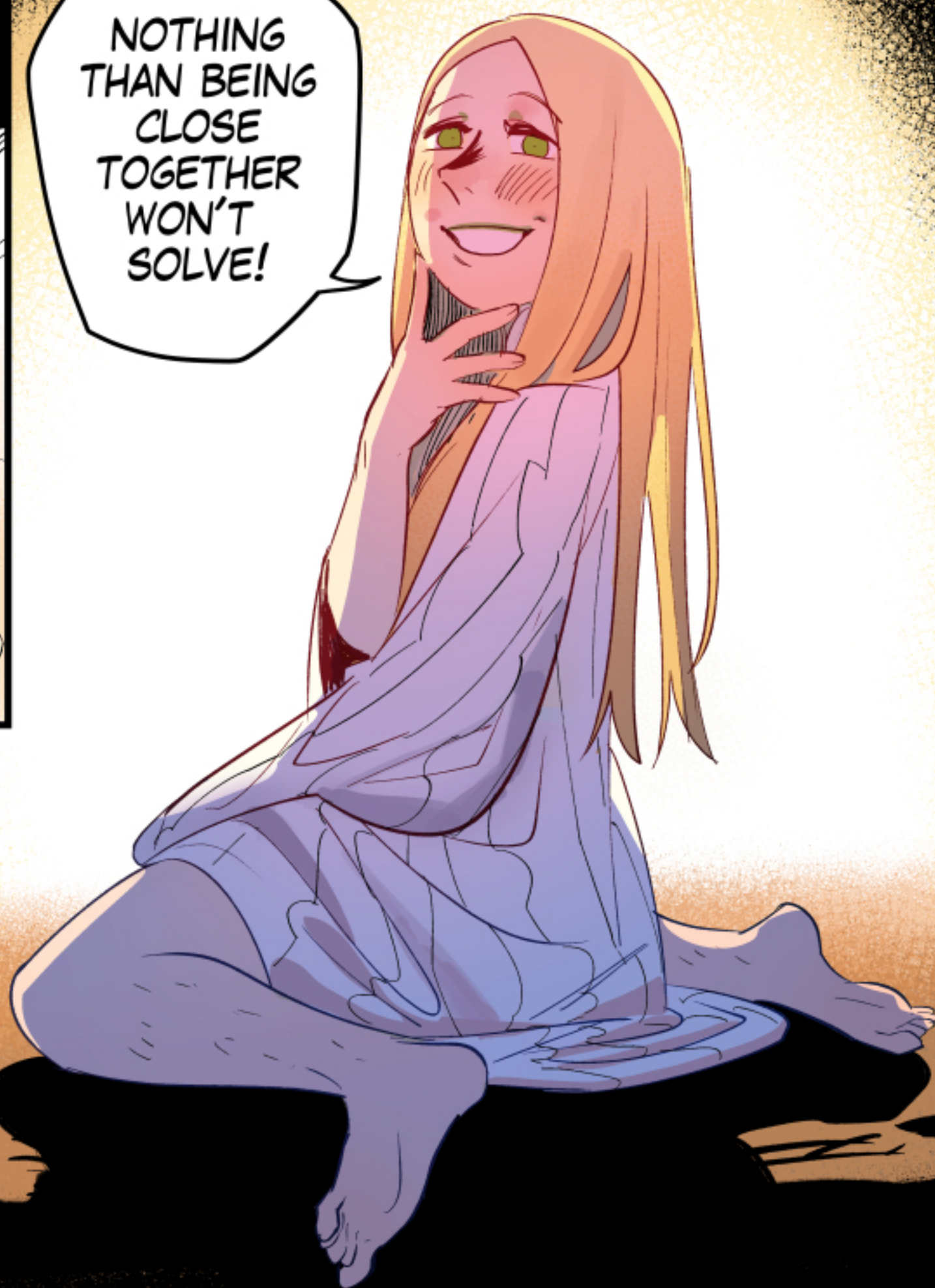
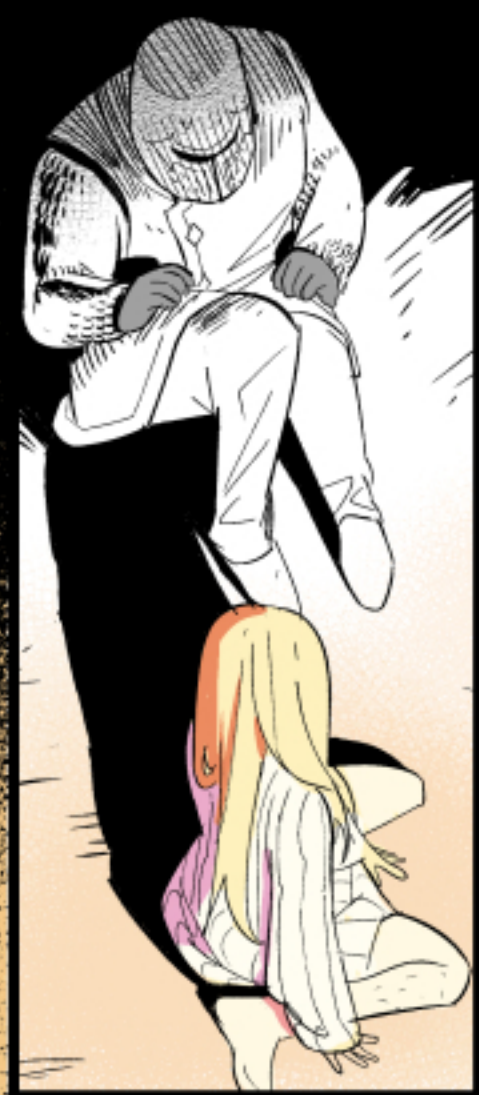
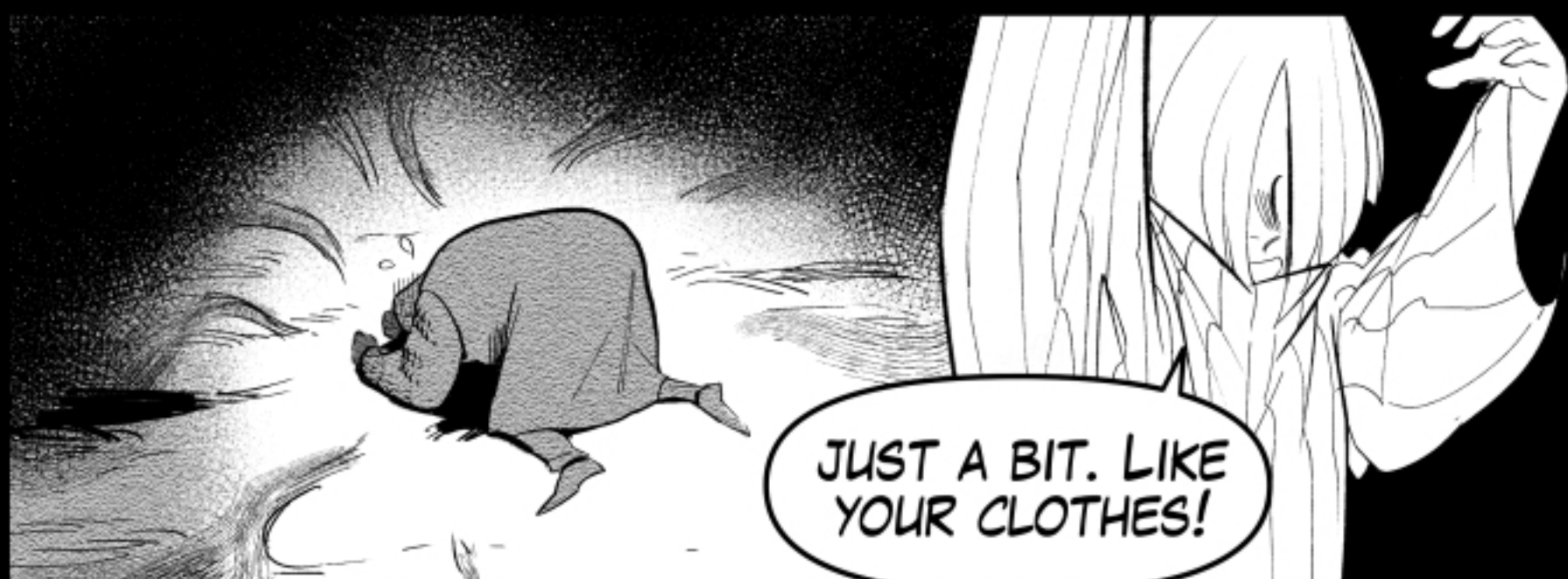




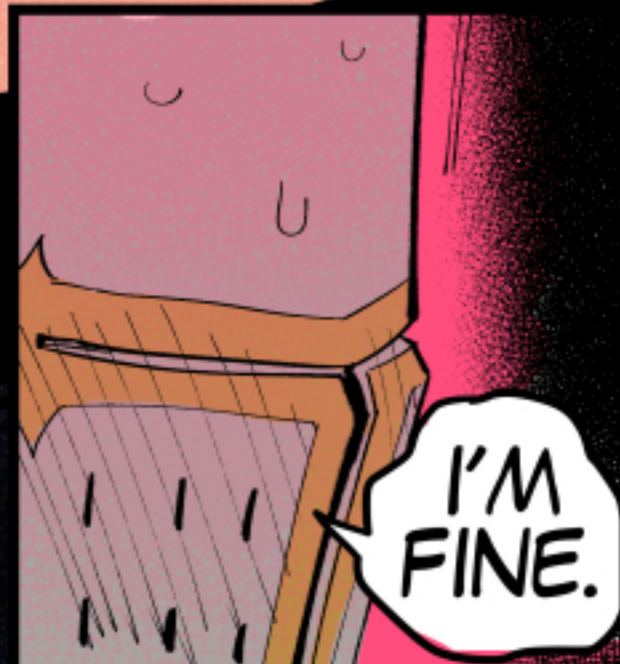
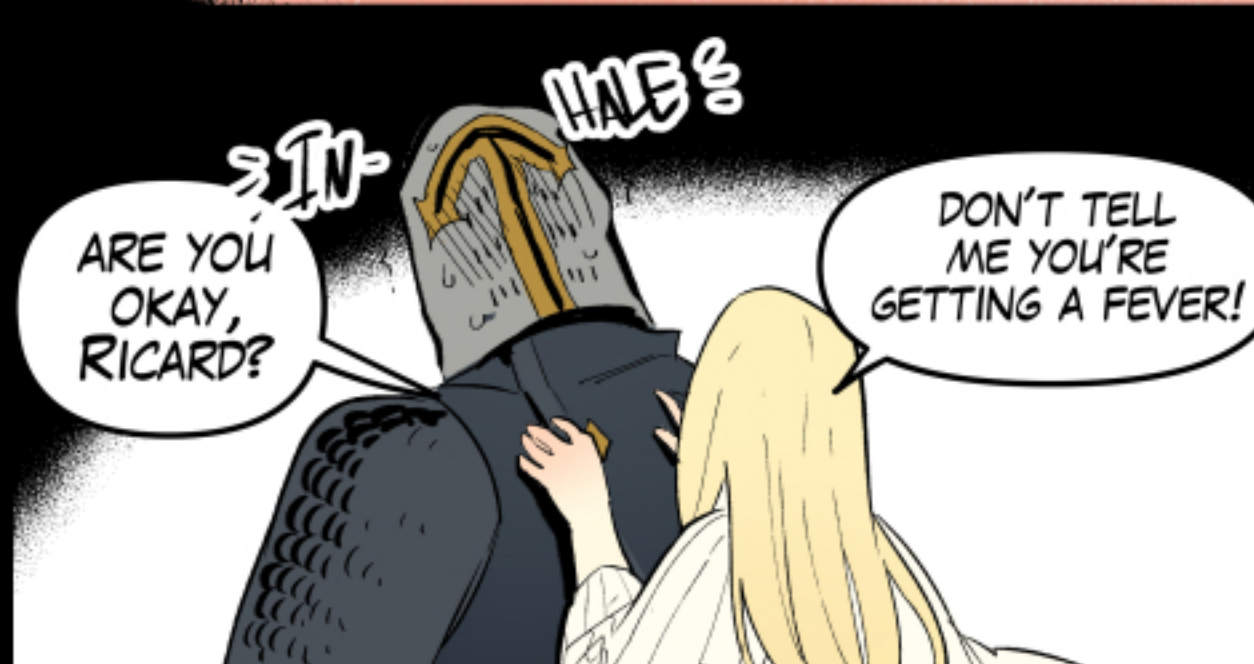
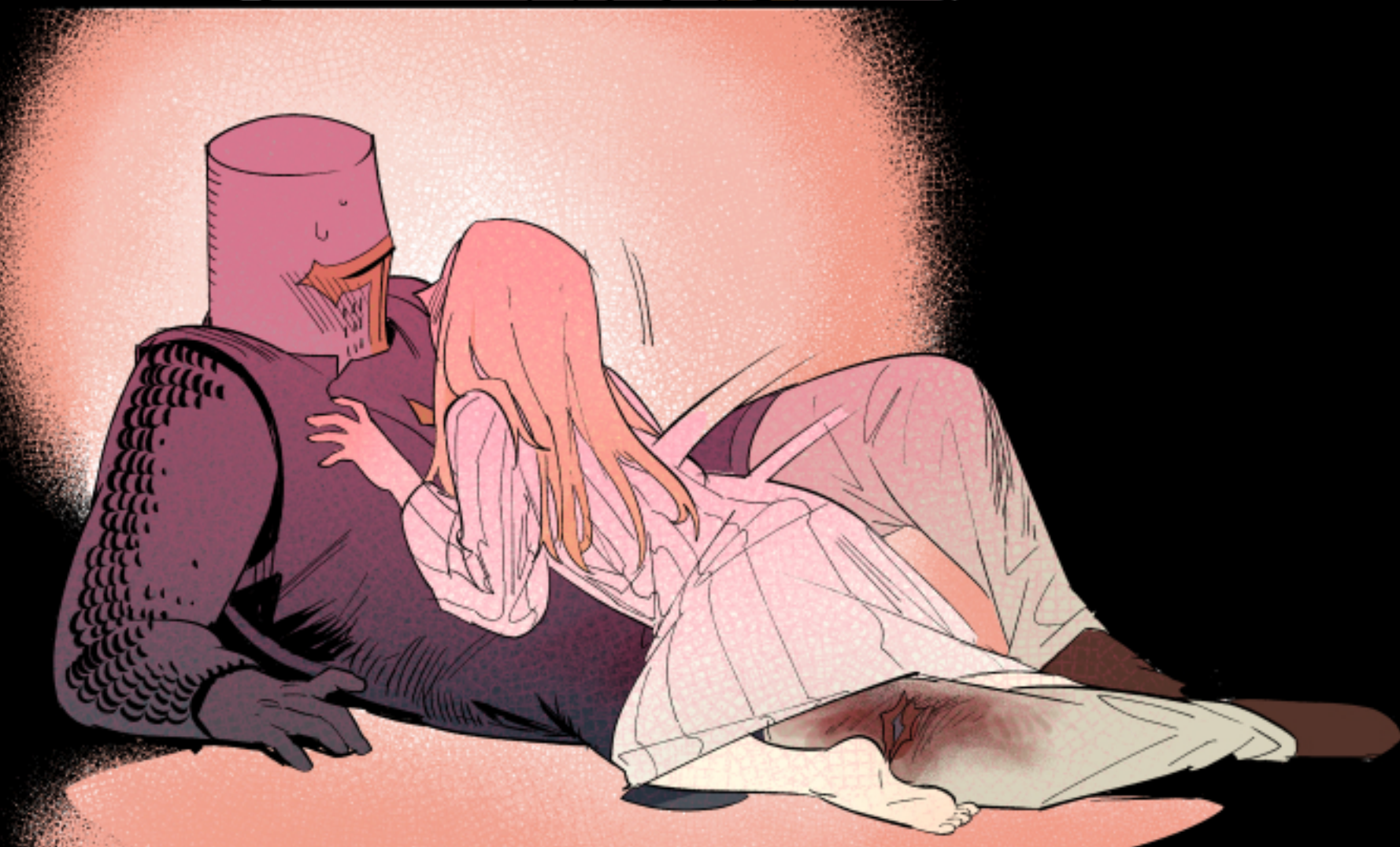
YOU HAD TO KEEP
YOUR EYES CLOSED!...

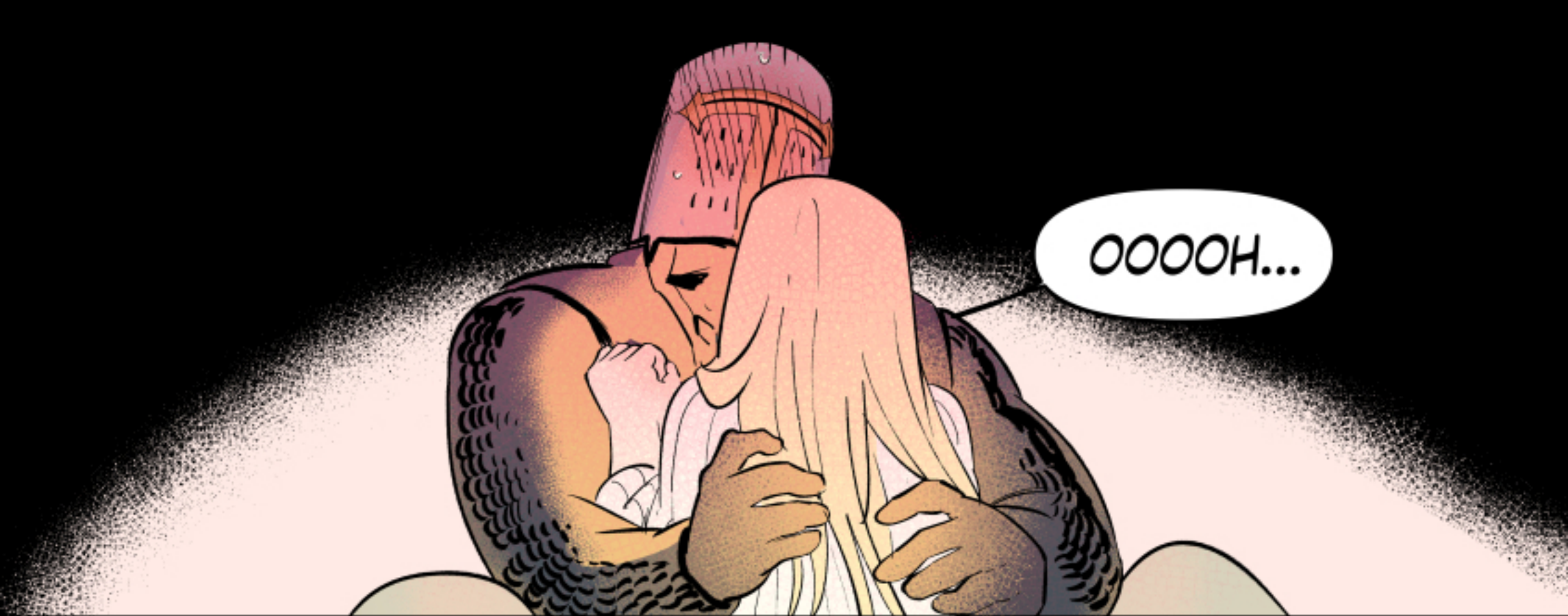
YOU GODDAMNED
IDIOT!!





CRACK

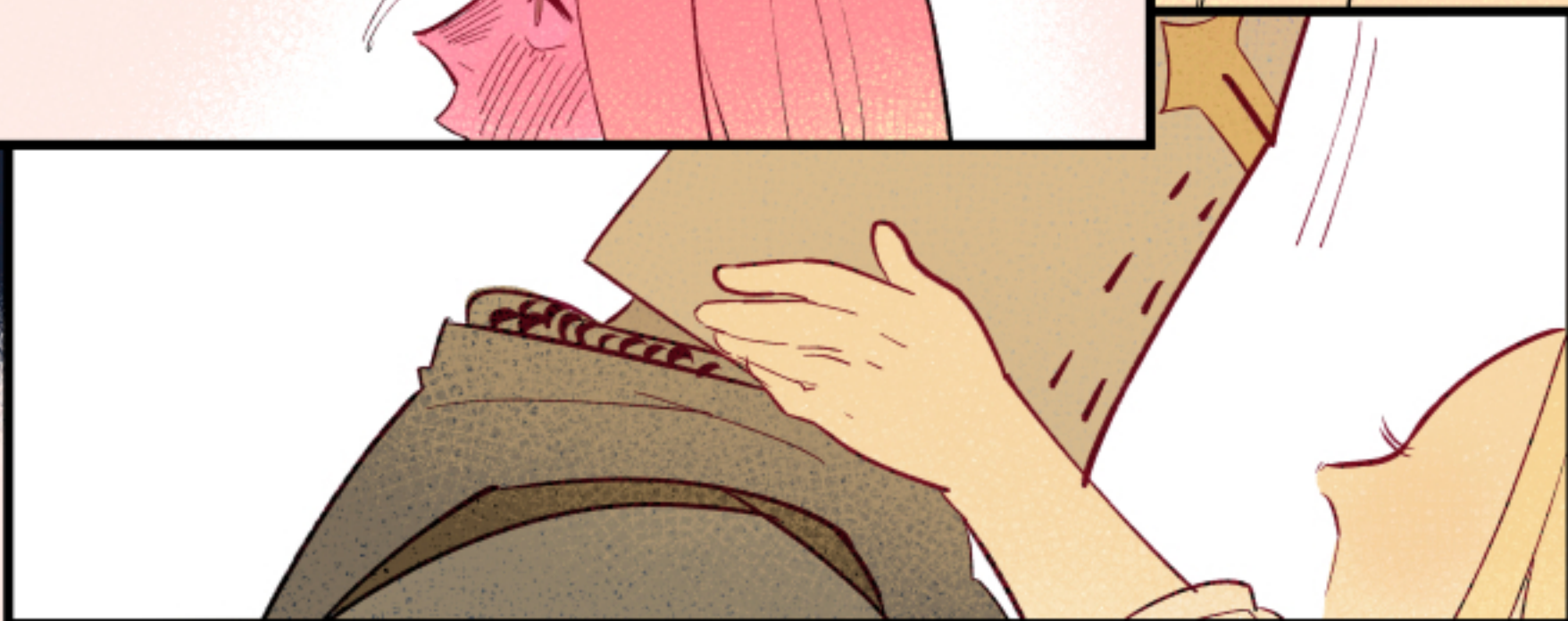


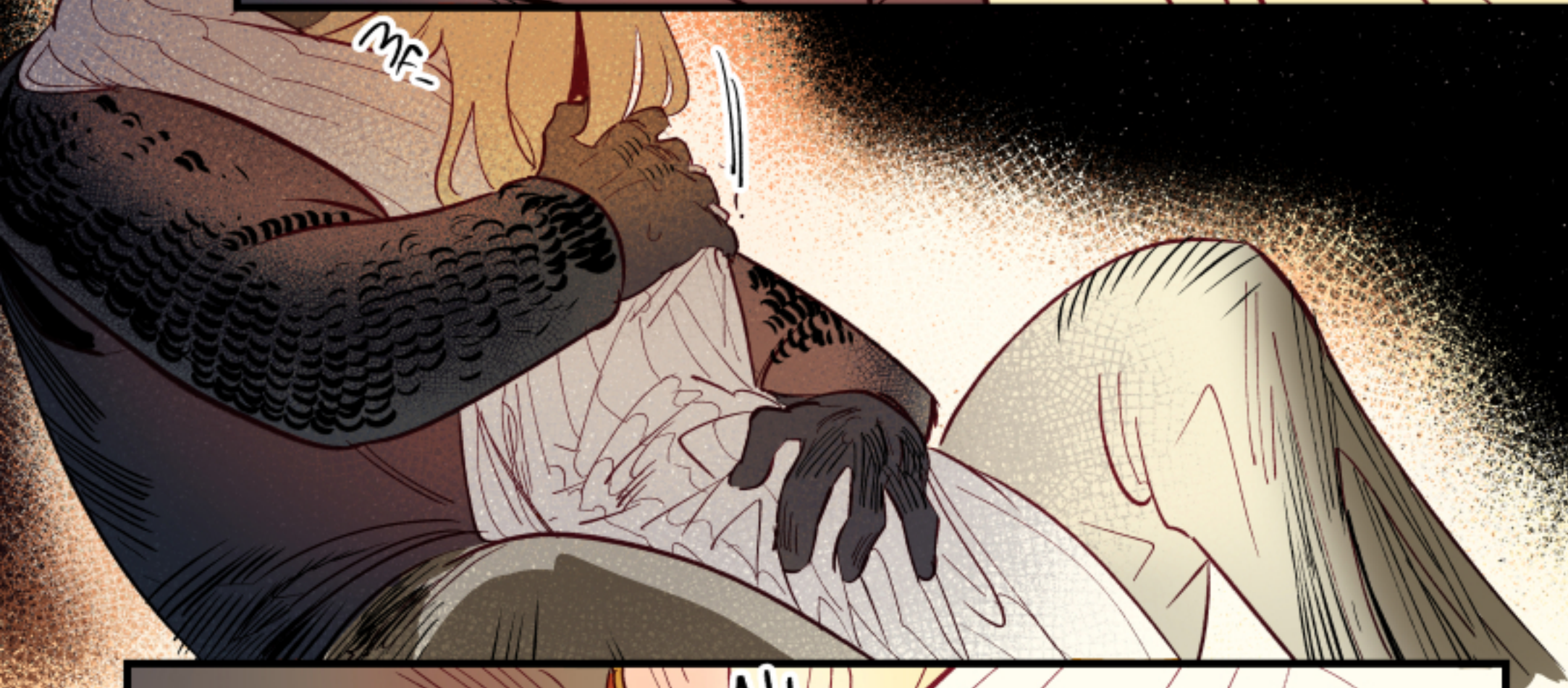
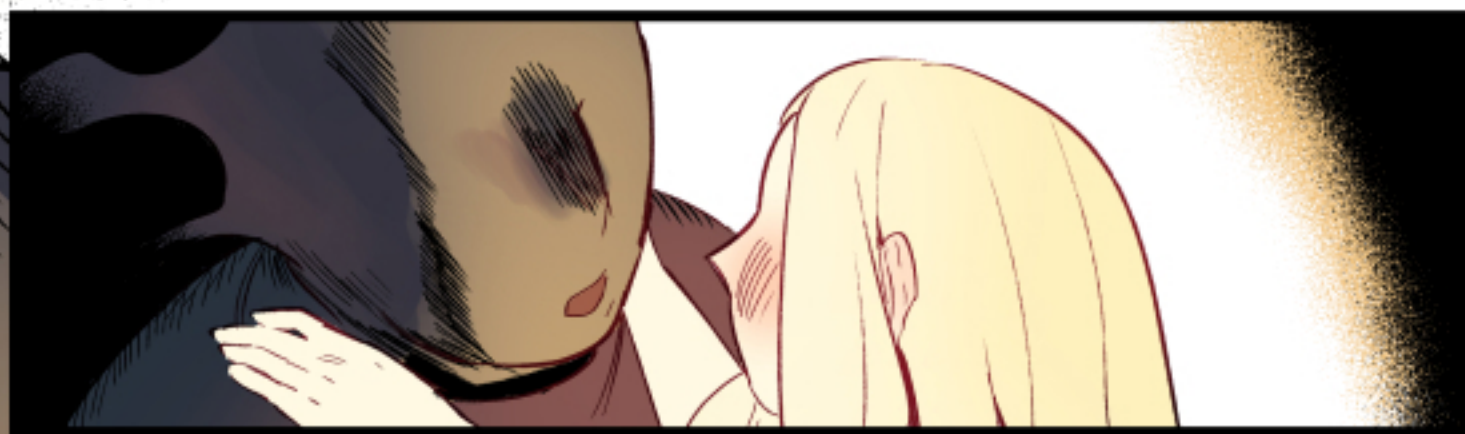


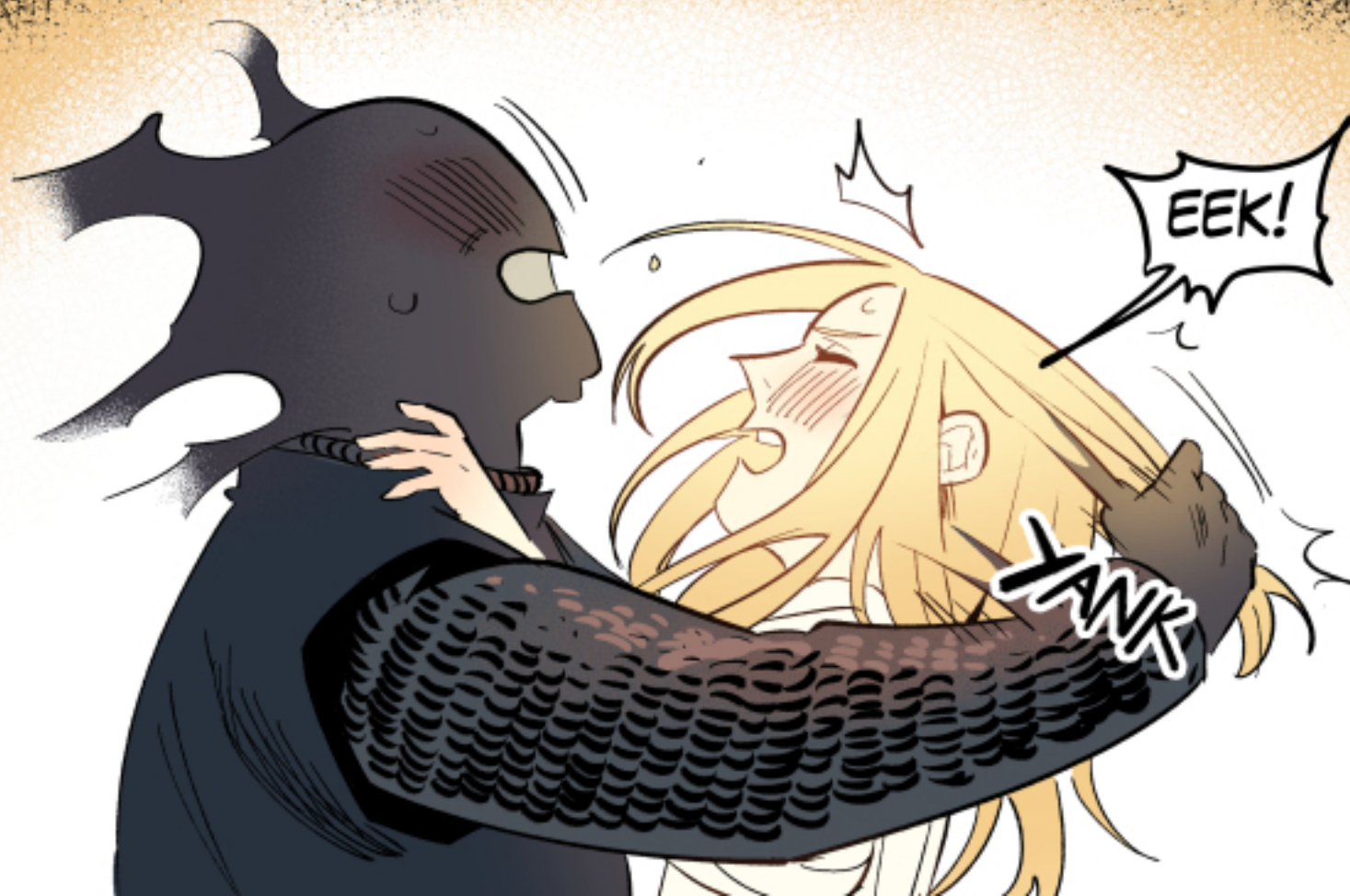
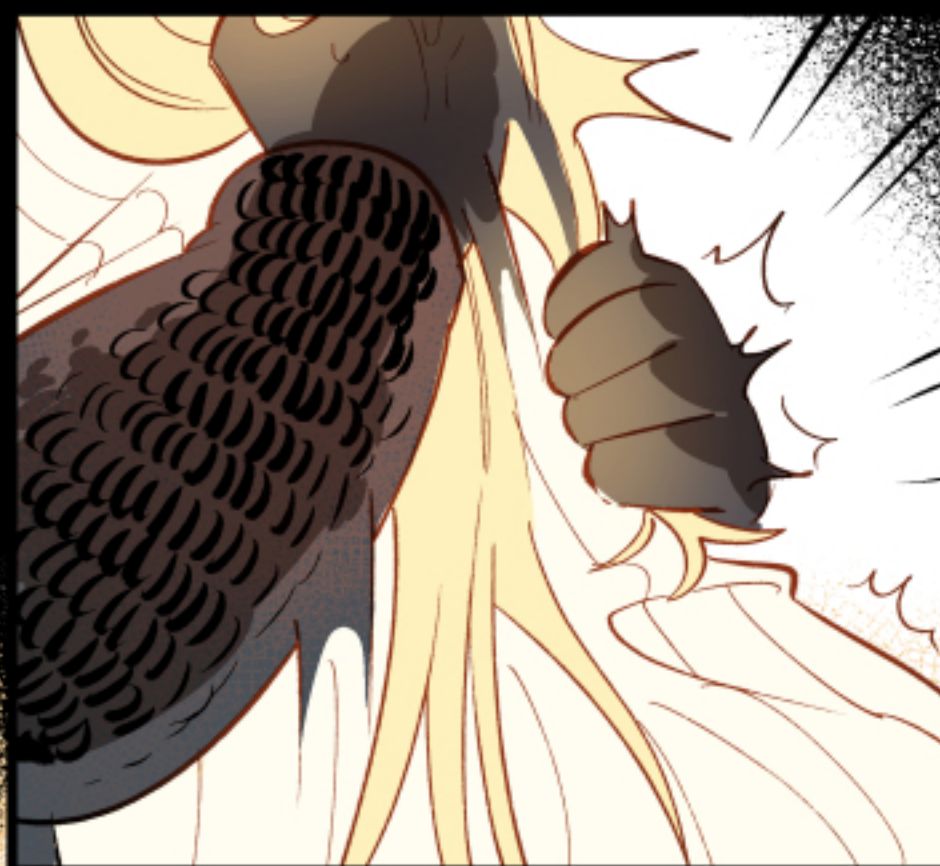
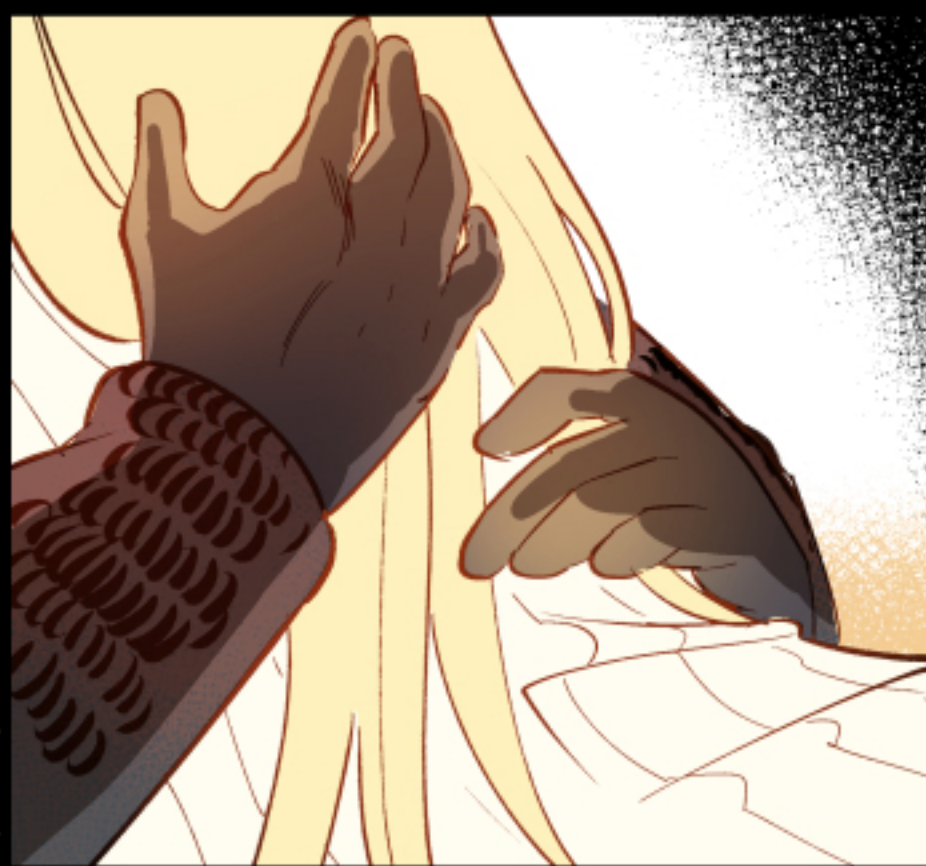
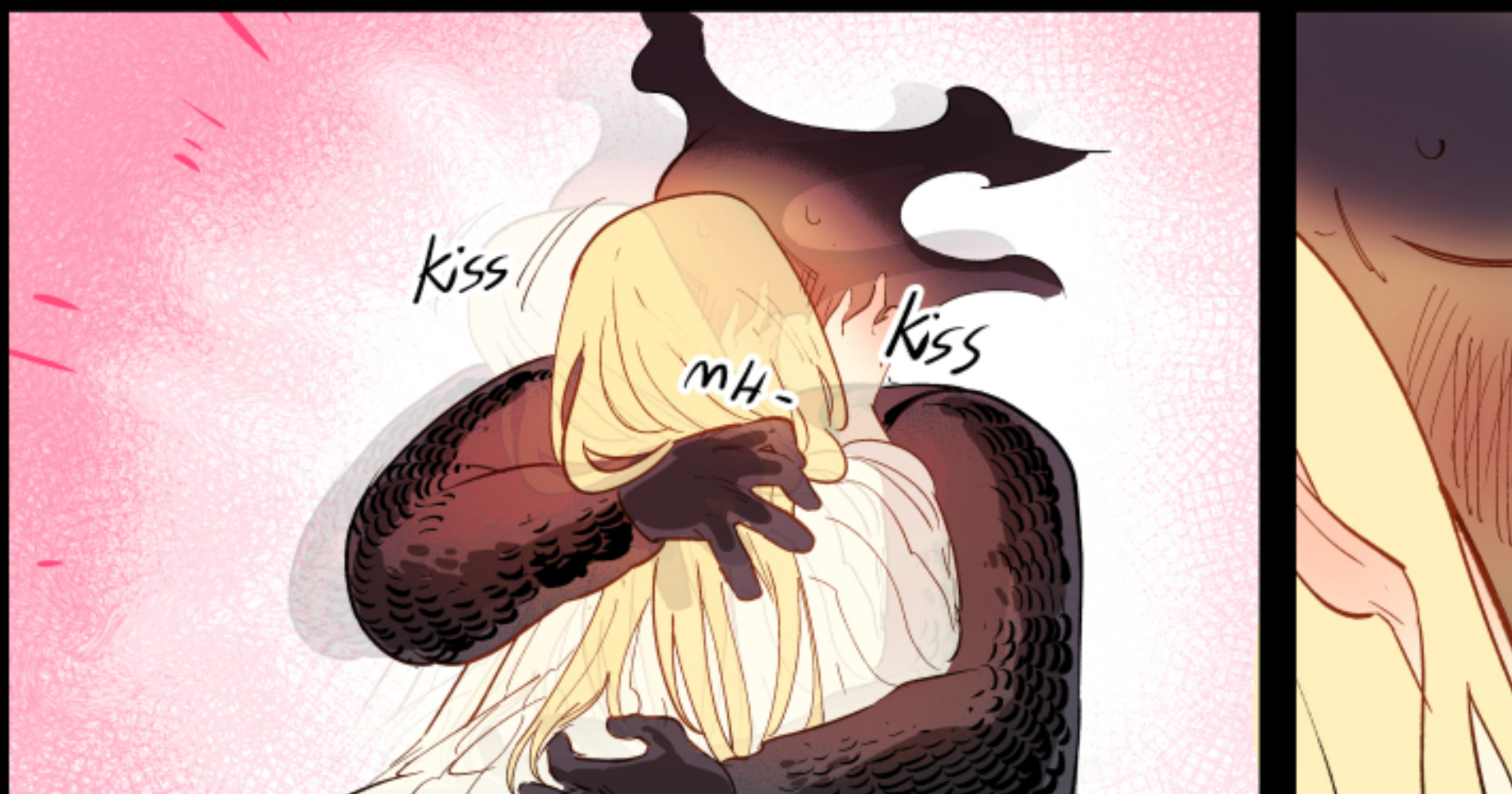
OOOOH...

YOU MEAN
THAT TYPE OF
"AT CROSSROADS"?

YES...

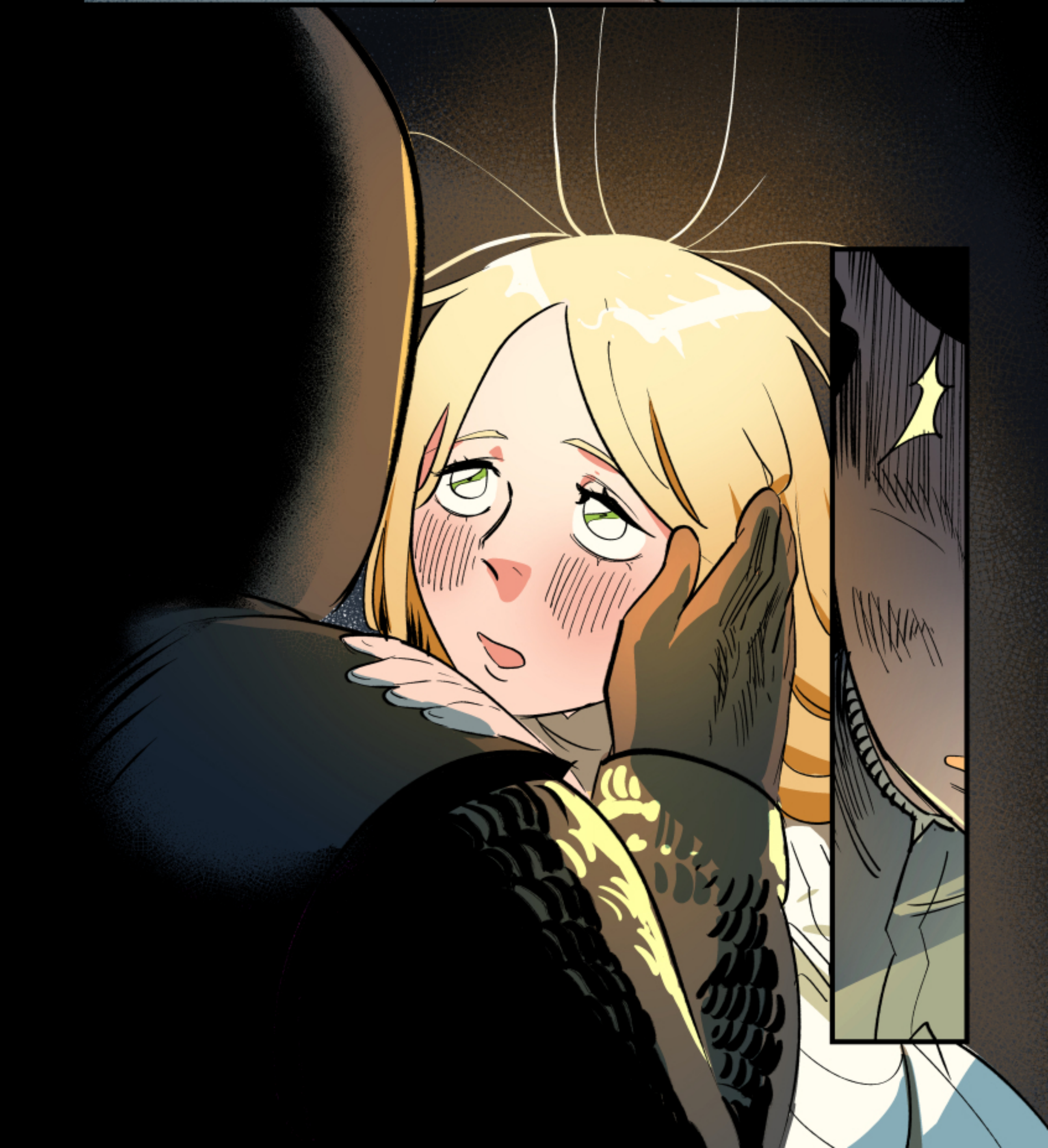






I'M SORRY-

IF WE KEPT
ON, I...



CRASH

